

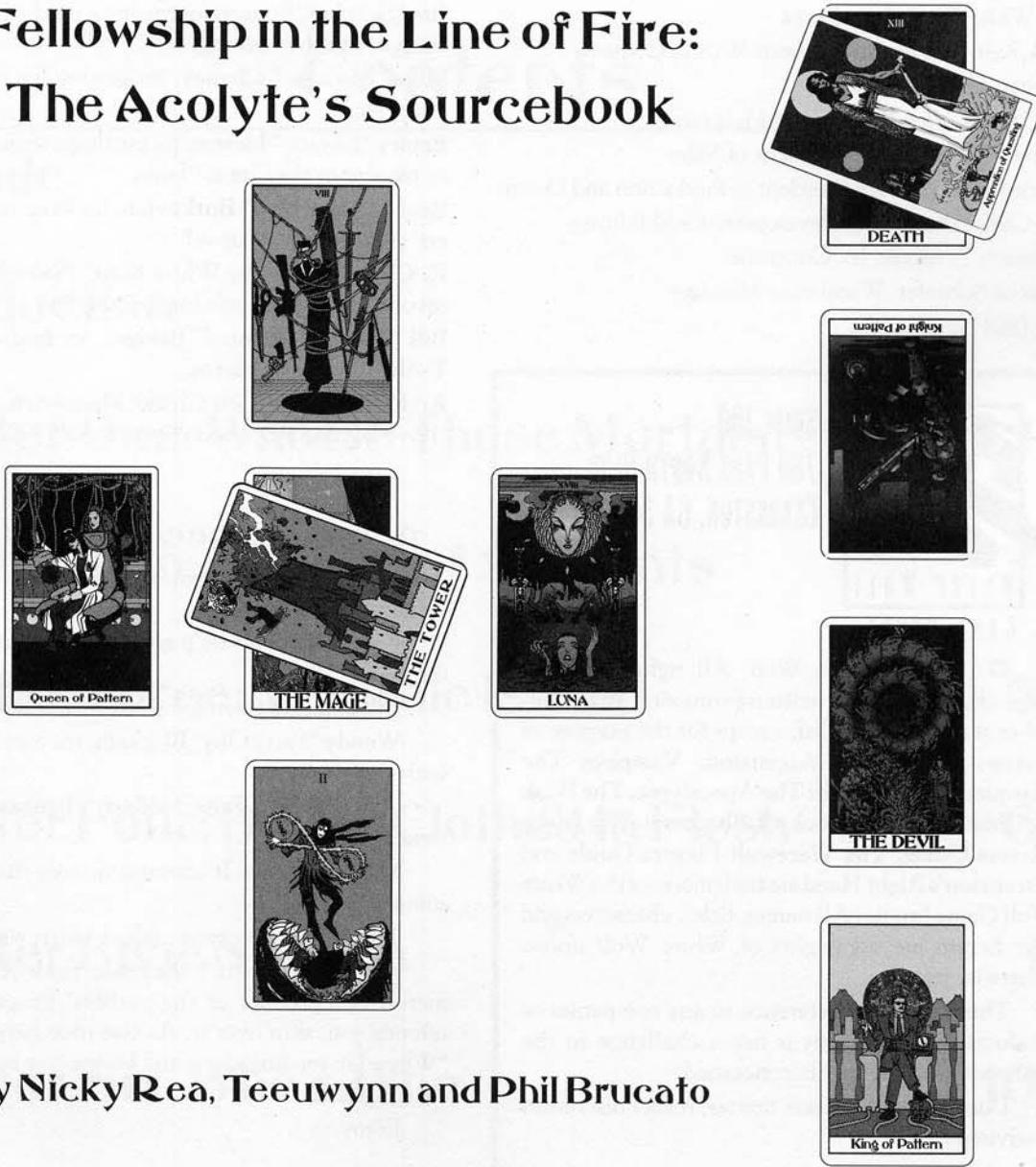
ASCENSION'S RIGHT HAND



The Acolyte Sourcebook
for Mage: The Ascension™

ASCENSION'S RIGHT HAND

Fellowship in the Line of Fire:
The Acolyte's Sourcebook



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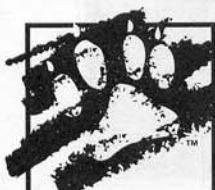
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Mage is a game. It contains no true rituals or demon summonings.

There are no esoteric codes hidden within the text.

Any material which the reader finds objectionable is merely the product of the authors' imaginations. If it offends you, skip over it. As one nice lady I know says: "When I'm reading along and I come to a bad word in the book, I just close my eyes."

Enjoy.

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Prelude: Take One

By Nicky Rea



*And to love: a god
And to fear: a flame
And to burn a crowd that has a name
— Live, "Selling the Drama"*

"Hey, somebody turn the damned air conditioning on! It's like a steambath in here!" A gravelly voice cut through the low-key music and murmured conversation, startling some into silence and producing an equally loud demand to shut up.

Most of the tables were filled with college students from the nearby university, enjoying the inexpensive pizza and beer or the vegetarian pasta which was the specialty at Crossovers. A wild variety of people sat at other tables — Goth zombies, health fanatics, martial arts students, bruiser-types and even a few who looked downright respectable.

It had been a slow night for the bar's real patrons, however. One or two regulars had dropped in and chatted with Zorro, the albino bartender. One even complimented her on her new quasi-mohawk. There weren't enough regulars here to call a meeting, though. She served a plate of zucchini lasagna to a skinny guy in the corner and wondered if she ought to close early tonight.

Then the Marauders arrived.

The mirror over the bar shattered, sending shards of silvered glass in all directions as an axe-wielding woman in a business suit stepped through. Behind her trailed seven creatures clustered behind a portly little man with a goatee and beret. He pulled a chair with the word "Director" stenciled on it through the remains of the mirror, set it up on the bar, and yelled, "... And Action!"

A squirrel-tailed, fanged zebra called out, "Take two!" and pointed her video camera toward the scene. Zorro felt ridiculous when in the midst of it all she

fastened on the idea that there had been no "Take one." Six pygmies swarmed after the axe-woman, who headed full-tilt for the table where the bruisers were sitting.

Several people made for the door, running over anyone in their way. The bruisers stood to confront the screaming Amazon-cum-corporate raider as she launched herself at them. Neither seemed impressed, though their eyes flickered red momentarily.

"Oh, shit!" yelled Zorro, diving for cover. "HIT Marks!"

With a whirring *kachunk*, the HIT Marks' chain guns rose over their shoulders, and they fired point-blank at their opponents. Two of the pygmies went down in a sickening spray.

"Effects! Not so much blood!" the director barked. "We don't want an R rating here!"

Several large holes appeared in the woman then sealed shut as she leaped at the one on the left. Her axe sheared through part of his head, revealing sparking wiring.

"Ha ha!" crowed the director. "We just took *Terminator II* one better! Take that, you hyper-steriod technopath!"

Zorro crouched behind an overturned table as slugs tore the wall behind her into plaster chips. "Is it always this exciting?" the skinny guy cracked. She raised her eyebrows and gave him her best are-you-for-real stare. Seizing a brief moment of relative safety, she leaped forward and tumbled behind the bar.

The other two pygmies jumped atop the second HIT Mark and began pummeling it with their tiny fists. Surprisingly, they left dents. The Amazon panted and shrieked as she chopped the first HIT Mark to shiny pieces.

The HIT Mark burdened with the pygmies spun in an arc, firing at any and all. Bullets sprayed the room.



"Whoops!" cried the director, overturning his chair behind the bar and almost landing on Zorro. "I've never liked all this violence myself," he confided, "but it's what the audience demands." Zorro winced. The director scowled, surveying the damage. "Props, it seems, have outdone themselves this time, but Set Dressing's going to have a fit if we need a third take." He replaced the chair and climbed into it again. The video camera-wielding zebra, who had ducked at the first hail of bullets, gave him a dirty look. "Cut!" called the director, but no one listened. Zorro found her gun and eased around the end of the bar, setting up a clear shot.

It took only moments for the pygmies, the axe-woman and Zorro's occasional bullet to bring down the second HIT Mark. The axe-woman picked up the android's severed head, ran into a nearby still life painting, and disappeared, followed by the two remaining pygmies who carried their comrades' remains. The zebra looked at Zorro kindly for a moment and said, "Sorry about the mess. I hope you'll have no trouble with the police."

Zorro laughed. "In this neighborhood?"

Smiling (Zorro wasn't sure if it qualified as a smile), the zebra leaped through after the others.

The director yelled "Cut!" again. This time, the action subsided. Picking up his chair, he moved to the painting as well. "Thank you, everyone! Cast party is at eight! Good night!" he cried as he stepped through the picture frame and vanished.

Zorro surveyed the wrecked HIT Marks, her bullet-riddled walls and the skinny guy, who was the only customer left in the building. Then she pulled draft beers for herself and Skinny and leaned on the bar. He looked questioningly at the HIT Marks.

"Don't ask," she said.

He smiled tentatively. "Okay."

Just another damned night at Crossovers.



Introduction

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but on the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise,
Doth ask a drink divine:
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

— Ben Jonson, "Song: To Celia"



It wasn't a good town — all hard-edged buildings and dark alleys strewn with trash, human and otherwise. Not the best place to be running for her life. She'd tried to shake the two techno-assassins, but they kept coming back for more. Winded and bloody, she made for the alley ahead just as they turned the corner behind her.

Nice coat, she thought, momentarily distracted by the black leather duster worn by the ruggedly ugly man window-shopping at the corner store.

He didn't acknowledge her presence as she whipped into the alley, but turned as though to stroll up the street as the assassins followed their quarry.

A sizzling light momentarily lit the alley before abruptly dying. "Damn it!" he heard the woman's desperate voice.

"You can do nothing we cannot counter," one of the assassins said.

"Oh, yeah?" asked the man in the coat, stepping into the alley behind them and firing off two bursts from his previously hidden submachine gun. "Then counter that, ya mothers."

Cody smiled at his partner as the assassins slumped to the ground.

Mages do not, and cannot, stand alone. Powerful as the Awakened may be, they require the help of custos, or "followers"—friends, acolytes, servants, allies and sometimes slaves—to survive and prosper in their ever-changing world.

Ascension's Right Hand concerns these custos, the normal (and special) people and creatures who live alongside and assist mages in their lives and struggles. Some of these non-mages know the score, but others move through their lives never knowing they were ever involved with the mystick ones.

Who, What and Why



It's not easy love, but you've got friends you can trust,
Friends will be friends...

— Queen, "Friends Will Be Friends"

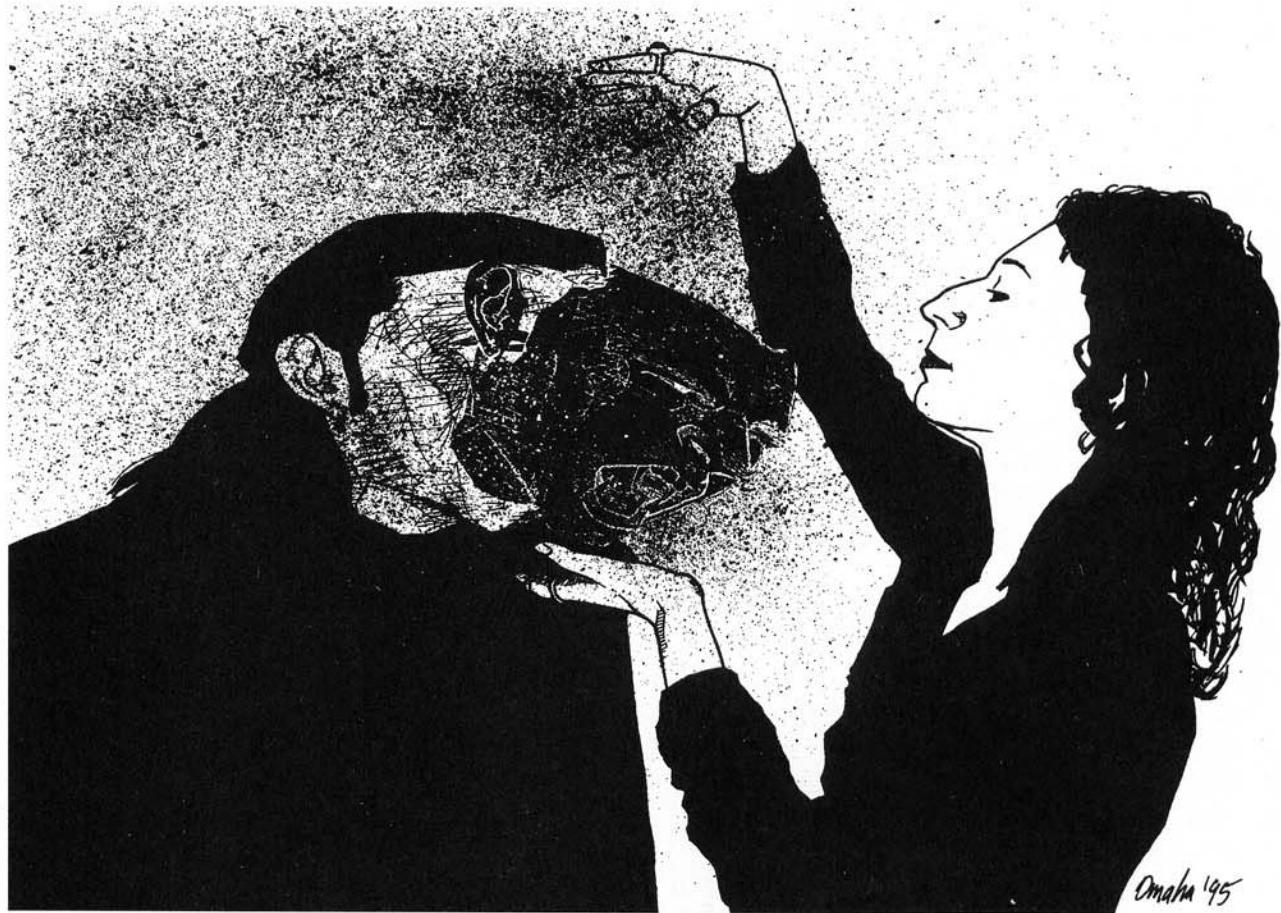
What're ya looking at me for? Ya got a problem? I said I'm a custos, kid. And so are you. It ain't no insult. The word "custos" is from the old form for "favored servant." Now don't ask me what old form, 'cause I don't know, and if ya don't like being called a servant, take it up with your mage. You wanna hear this or not? Then sit back and listen, and ol' Cody'll tell ya a thing or two.

Custos are the companions, friends, acolytes, followers, servants, familiars and sidekicks of mages. Got through the list pretty well for an old guy, huh? Most of us don't know a lot about the mystick arts, but our skills and talents can sometimes get us through better than our mage's powers. In this world, ya gotta watch out for each other. Sometimes having a friend to hang out with, a companion to watch your back, or a sidekick who lets ya hide out at his place may mean the difference between survival and damnation. And don't think it's only the Trad mages that need what we can give 'em.

There's all kinds of custos. We're childhood friends helping to keep a mage's secrets hidden, lab technicians cleaning the lab so our boss can work undisturbed, and coyote-ugly vampires arranging an escape through the sewers for a mage on the run. Pretty obvious what the mages get out of the deal, ain't it? Now you're looking at me like I'm supposed to tell ya what you're gonna get from your mage. Probably a lot of hell, kid. If ya don't know why you're doin' what you're doin', I sure can't tell ya. You'll hafta figure that one out for yourself.

Living on the fringes of the Ascension War, allied with those whose real purposes they may not even understand, the custos struggle to survive and adapt. With far less power than the mages they associate with, all are prime targets for attacks from their companions' enemies. So why do they do it?

Some admire the mage and what she is trying to do. Some want to learn and hope to discover their own aptitude for magick. Others are family members, lovers or old friends and feel that their bond requires them to help. Many are employees of one sort or another and handle household duties or business matters in exchange for money. A few, those who are aware that reality is flexible, may see it as their duty to help keep it that way (or want to help the Technocracy keep things stable). Other custos join with mages



Omaha '95

because they hate or fear their mage's enemies. Some may be on the run and seek safety from someone more powerful. At least a few find their lives more fun and exciting since meeting the Awakened one and look for opportunities to increase the excitement and have blow-out parties. Others simply find that working for a mysterious employer or battling magick-wielding foes provides them with a challenge.

How'd I get into all this? Well, it was a long time ago. No smart remarks, kid, I know how old I am. There was this girl. She was somethin' special. Turned out she was special in more ways than one. When they came lookin' for her, I wasn't quite ready to just let 'em take her. See, I thought she was the one for me. That was back when there used to be romance in the world, not like today and you kids. Okay, okay. I'll quit callin' ya kid. Whadda ya wanna be called? Death-threat? Yeah, well. So anyway, I blasted 'em with my daddy's shotgun. It was them or us, I figured. And I been with her ever since. Nah, we never did get together that way. Just wasn't in the cards, but I've watched her back for forty years and never regretted one of 'em.

Their backgrounds are as varied as their reasons for becoming custos. Students of the occult, fantasists, New Agers, science fiction aficionados and punks are all easily integrated into life as custos. Relatives, students, teachers, clergy and other professionals (doctors, lawyers, librarians, etc.) may find themselves drawn into things as a side effect of their professions. Attracted to the mage for one reason or another, psi talents, vampires or Garou might fall into the role, and familiars (from cats to ghosts in the machine to imaginary playmates) may be summoned. Custos might quite literally be anyone. The real differentiations among them are their varying degrees of talent and power.

Consider yourself lucky that you're able to talk to me. Some of us ain't such willing participants in the War, ya know. What War? Kid, where you been? And what has your mage been tellin' you? Sit her down, and make her spit it out. You ain't Awakened, but ya ain't dumb either!

She ain't been giving ya drugs, has she? Have ya noticed if your mind is still clear on everything ya wanna think about? Sometimes ya gotta watch it. I'd rather do what I do 'cause I choose to than be forced into it and made to think it's all my own idea. Oh, you didn't know it could be done? Well, hey, I ain't 100% sure my mage hasn't messed with my mind. I just think this is all my own choice. Make ya paranoid? It should.

It is a regrettable fact that many mages force service from their custos. With mind-altering magick and drugs at their fingertips, mages are more than capable of compelling service. But drugged or controlled servants are not as effective as free-willed ones. Blackmail, threats against loved ones and intimations of possible torture can often bring companions into line and exact service from them. Little-valued by their mage masters, these custos lead wretched existences. Many are ripe for rebellion, but most have long since lost the will to resist.

Yeah, kid...sorry... Death-threat, ya never know where life is gonna take ya. Just stick with your mage, though, and I guarantee it'll be interestin'.



How to Use This Book

Whoever wants to be creative in good and evil, he must first be an annihilator and destroy values.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

This sourcebook sheds some light on the followers who so often disappear beneath the heading "Allies." Here, Storytellers will find several ideas for stories and chronicles based around custos. The players may all play custos of a Storyteller-controlled mage; some might be mages, while others play their friends, servants, bodyguards, lovers and familiars. All these roles and more are detailed in **Ascension's Right Hand**. If players don't want to be tied down to a specific mage, they might be a group that is affiliated with a certain cabal, or natives of a Horizon Realm, or might not even know that their mysterious friend is a mage. They might be Chantry servants, bodyguards or troubleshooters. They may have no connection with mages at all. The information in the book allows troupes to generate normal mortals, weird Horizon realm beasts, artificial intelligences, vampires, werewolves and familiar spirits. Some have special abilities and powers; others don't.

Some of the most intense and interesting roleplaying comes from playing characters who aren't all-powerful and who don't have magick at their fingertips. Living in the World of Darkness without supernatural powers can be just the challenge a troupe's characters need to add that edge of excitement and imminent danger. The pre-generated characters included in this book can be used as is or can serve as templates for creating players' custos characters. So long as the points used to generate them remain about the same, players and Storytellers should feel free to tweak them a little to customize them for their chronicles.

Alternatively, the Storyteller could use the details and characters given in the book to populate her chronicle. The people at the mage society's fringe must also live in the Gothic-Punk milieu of the World of Darkness, and they have far fewer powers and defenses with which to protect themselves. When the Technocracy wants to get to a mage without directly confronting him, they might kidnap his un-Awakened girlfriend and use her for bait, or they might replace her with a clone. What about that big, black, friendly dog that followed the characters around all last night? Will they guess that it was a familiar and told its master everything it heard and saw? If the pre-generated characters given in the book are used as helpers for the opposition, however, the Storyteller should change a few details. Players can buy and read books too, and encountering someone who is supposed to be mysterious or a spy and already knowing what he is will spoil the enjoyment.



TC

Finally, the Storyteller can have players generate "normal" mortals and have them play through several stories, becoming increasingly aware of strange occurrences behind the scenes and coincidental events and meetings. Only after running what is basically a mortals' chronicle does the Storyteller reveal that they were all being tested in some way — either to serve as custos for one faction or another or to become mages themselves.

Likewise, Umbral beasties and familiar spirits might enjoy an Umbral chronicle, or vampires and werewolves might believe themselves to be playing *Vampire* or *Werewolf* until they come in contact with mages and form bonds with them. The players might even create normal mortals who are Embraced during the game or who discover their true heritage as Garou some time before or after they become custos. The possibilities are limited only by what the players and Storyteller can conceive and the Storyteller's tolerance for the unusual.

What's Where

Ascension's Right Hand is broken down into the following chapters:

Chapter One: Who Be These Mortals?

This chapter explores custos in detail and is broken down into Tradition, Technocracy, Nephandi and Marauder followers.

Chapter Two: Society of Servants

Exploring the internal and external relationships of the custos, this chapter provides insight into their motivations, fellowships and interactions with mages.

Chapter Three: The Tale Is Told

This chapter offers Storyteller suggestions including hints for troupe play, setting and story ideas.

Chapter Four: Bones Clothed in Flesh

Rules for custos character creation, including concepts, new Traits, advantages and devices, are covered in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Numina

These paranormal powers allow un-Awakened hedge magicians and psychics to work some small amount of magic (as opposed to *magick*). Although such powers, called Numina, are limited, they transcend the supposed limits of technological reality and hearken back to more mystic times.

Chapter Six: Who's Who

This chapter profiles a bunch of custos (everything from servants to weird Horizon Realm beasties).

Lexicon

Acolyte — Acolytes are mages' companions of fairly low power and ability. Many of them are unaware of the true nature of their employers or friends.

Consort — These companions have certain powers or abilities which allow them to operate at a higher level than acolytes. Though not Awakened, consorts know what the mages are and are aware of the Ascension War and the fluid nature of reality.

Custos — Custos is a catch-all term for mages' companions, whether they are acolytes, consorts or familiars.

Familiar — Familiars are spirits summoned by mages. They are housed within bodies which are specially prepared to receive them. Many appear as normal animals, but they may be almost anything, from cats to computer programs.

Hedge Magician — An un-Awakened sorcerer who uses a very limited form of static magic (as opposed to dynamic True Magick). Though they command powers greater than those of common mortals, their arts are limited by a variety of essential foci, rituals and other perimeters and do not disrupt the Tapestry the way True Magick does. Such magic works only one way, every time, under certain conditions and with limited effect and power.



Chapter One: Who Be These Mortals?

Acolytes? Sounds like some sort o' church group. Consors? Isn't that somebody who ain't good enough to marry a king or queen? Familiars? Why don't you just call 'em pets and have done with it? Who comes up with these lamebrained names? I call 'em servants and flunkies. And I ain't never felt familiar enough with anything that I'd let it bond with my mind. Call 'em what you want, but tell the truth while you're at it!

— Sam Haine, Verbena Master



Who are the people who serve as mages' companions? What is their position within the Ascension War? Why are some chosen while others are not? Each faction has criteria they search for when seeking new companions. Acolytes need have no special talents at all. Consors tend to have marketable skills or special talents. Familiars are summoned by the mage with a specific purpose in mind.

All too often, mages view their most important associates as collections of useful abilities. With all the possibilities of this universe and others spread before them, the magickally Awakened have an unfortunate tendency to regard their helpers, even consors, as mere

tools. They seem unaware of the irony inherent in their own selective blindness regarding the people and creatures closest to them.

To some extent, the custos categories are arbitrary. An acolyte who has been with a mage for many years or who knows the true nature of reality might be considered a consor if she had more skills or useful talents. Some consors work for mages, but never really understand who it is that they are working for.

This chapter emphasizes the "utility value" of acolytes, consors and familiars to their mages. Yet, it is wise to remember that these "tools" are very much alive and have their own views of their "masters" and their own paths to follow.

Acolytes

I understand, you're busy saving the world. I'm expected to take care of these little, unimportant things, but you'd think it would be too much trouble for me to get some cooperation. Nasty necromancers are out there, threatening the human race, but meanwhile we're out of toilet paper.

— Simon Hawke, *The Wizard of Lovecraft's Cafe*

Good afternoon. The master is away at present, but I shall be more than happy to explain your new duties to you. I am Reynolds, the butler. Though you might believe that a butler has little to do with a guard's position, you would be in error. I oversee all the servants here at Haven House. If you have any sort of problem, please do not hesitate to bring it to me. I assure you, I shall find a solution to it. Do not ever disturb the master or his family and friends who live here with mundane concerns. They are very busy and cannot be bothered with the everyday running of the household.

Now as to your position, you shall guard the estate from trespassers. You will be on duty for six hours each day. We like to make certain our guards do not become inattentive through boredom. You have your own room, and there are several game rooms, a pool and a firing range where you may while away your hours. Every three months, you shall have a week off, at which time you may leave the estate. The salary is quite generous. I see you agree. Then everything is settled?

Good. Welcome to the staff. Your room is the third to the right down this hallway. You'll start tomorrow. I'll leave you to yourself until then. Oh, yes, there is just one more thing... don't let the flying leopards throw you. Just shoot them like you would anything else. I'm sure you'll get along splendidly!

Acolytes are companions of fairly low power and ability. This term suggests loyal, worshipful souls who aspire to follow in the path of their mage, but relatively few acolytes fit that description. While some acolytes know about magick, mages and the Ascension War, most have sketchy knowledge at best, and many are completely unaware of the true nature of their Awakened employers or friends. Acolytes range from menial Chantry servants to boon companions. Examples include bandmates, cultists, occult shop employees, lab techs, students or good friends. Servants (see **The Book of Chantries**) fall into this category.

Acolytes can be available to assist characters during stories by simply doing their jobs or by performing other necessary services depending on their loyalty and ability. They can also serve as useful hooks to draw the mage into adventures, either through their actions in their private lives or by their vulnerability to the mage's adversaries. Remember that acolytes are (generally) regular folks who may not necessarily volunteer to put themselves at great risk or cheerfully die for the mage. Of course, not all acolytes have a choice in these matters. Nephandi tend to think of (and treat) their acolytes as slaves. Marauder acolytes may be caretakers for their insane charges or be swept up into the altered reality of their madness.

Consors

If you ever need anything please don't hesitate
To ask someone else first
I'm too busy acting like I'm not naive
I've seen it all I was here first
—Nirvana, "Very Ape"

"Well, there goes lunch." Church emerged from the shadows of the alley and turned to follow Lorelei with his eyes, hunger written across his handsome features. Shard grabbed him by the collar and threw him most of the length of the alley back into the deep shadows, where he crashed into a dumpster.

"Damn you, Church!" she hissed, baring her fangs. "I'll kill you if you so much as look at Lorelei! Sate your thirst elsewhere, or control yourself! We're here to watch over her, not feed from her." Shards's ice blue eyes gleamed red in the darkness as she waited to see if her Childe would try to fight her. He picked himself up, glaring at her resentfully.

"But she was my type," he said plaintively.

"So are eight billion other people! You'll find some of them here in this city. Type O isn't that rare. Now come on, or we're going to lose her."

Shard's short black hair framed her delicate face, accentuating her high cheekbones and pallor. Her torn black stockings, hiking boots, a skirt which barely reached her upper thighs and a long black T-shirt with the slogan "All in all, I'd rather be in Philadelphia" were topped with a fringed, black leather jacket. Church wore jeans, black leather boots, a black T-shirt featuring the movie poster from "The Crow" and a patched fatigue jacket. His pale blond hair fell to his shoulders in a tousled mop. She looked like she might be a model. He looked about 14.

"Why are we following her if we aren't gonna feed off her?" he asked.

"Just shut up and come on, Church. We need to keep her in sight. Somebody's been stalking her, and I have no intention of letting them get her."

"But I'm hungry..." he mumbled, then sighed as they hurried to keep the dark-haired Hollow One in sight.

Lorelei's hair was much longer than Shard's and had brilliant silver and red streaks which started at her left temple. She wore a spidery black lace skirt and a black see-through shirt over a ripped leotard. A fringed shawl tied around her waist formed another layer of skirt. Her ripped black leggings ended half an inch above her ankles, and she wore black ballet slippers that were turning gray with age. Silver earrings dangled to her shoulders and pierced one eyebrow. Her pale face stood out in stark contrast to the ring of dark makeup around her eyes and her black lipstick.

She crossed the street and disappeared around a corner. Shard hurried after her while Church lagged behind, still grumbling. They heard the sound of a car accelerating as they reached the turn. Church didn't hear the click of the safety being released on the gun, but Shard's preternatural hearing warned her, and she was already gone by the time he opened his mouth to ask what was happening.



As he rounded the corner, he saw Shard diving in front of Lorelei and being cut down by gunfire. Shard screamed as the bullets tore into her. Glass from the storefront shattered and cascaded over the two figures. The car screeched around another turn and sped away from the scene of the attempted assassination. Blood seemed to be everywhere. It had sprayed the jagged glass windows and pooled on the sidewalk. Church didn't even think of it as food. He thought Shard was dead until she groaned and tried to sit up.

Lorelei shook the glass off herself. She held Shard's head in her lap and stroked her raven hair. "Jesus, Shard, you idiot, you're hurt! Can you heal yourself? Why do you do this shit anyway?"

Shard laughed. "Somebody's gotta watch over you, sis. That's my job!"

Operating on a higher level of ability than common acolytes, consors know exactly what is going on and often accompany mages into "the line of fire." For both Tradition and Technocracy, these include very skilled un-Awakened mortals (witch-hunters, agents, scientists, doctors, etc.), vampire or werewolf companions and Horizon Realm beings. Though not mages themselves, consors are aware of the true nature of reality. They lack the aptitude, ability or desire to learn True Magick. Guardians (see *The Book of Chantries*) and constructs such as golems and robots belong to this category.

These competent allies are usually more skilled than acolytes and more loyal as well. Consors tend to be long-term associates of mages and will almost always cheerfully risk their lives for the mage. Over the course of time, many mages find themselves owing debts to their longtime companions.

The familiarity which results from the longer span of the relationships, the mutual obligations and intimate knowledge of each other, leads to a more equitable relationship between consor and mage. This is particularly true in the case of supernatural consors such as vampires, werewolves or spirits. Most consors have seen the mage looking her worst (physically, mentally and emotionally), and quite a few have dragged their mage's butt out of the fire on more than one occasion. This shared experience makes it very difficult for the mage to successfully sneer at the consor over the dinner table or order her around indiscriminately. The obvious relationship of the superior employer to the lowly servant, so often found in the interactions of mages and acolytes, is rarely seen between a mage and a consor.

This relationship of relative equality often holds true even among the Nephandi and Marauders. While Nephandi will always be cruel and tyrannical in their relationships, Nephandi consors are often "junior partners" in the enterprise of corruption. Marauder consors usually join the mage in creative insanity, helping to mold and twist the universe (and often the mage) like taffy.

Familiars

Daddy only stares into the distance
There's only so much more that he can take
Many miles away something crawls from the slime at the
Bottom of a dark Scottish lake...

—The Police, "Synchronicity II"

My name is Suzi, and I'm five. I live here on Oak Street with my friend Cindi. She's five too. We like to swing on the swings and play dollies and dress-up. I like Cindi. She gives me good things to eat. Cindi's mommy and daddy can't see me or hear me. Cindi's teacher can't either, but Cindi can. Her mommy and daddy and teacher told Cindi my name is "Imaginary." They don't know it's really Suzi.

One day a bad man took Cindi away in his car. He didn't know I got in too. He took us to a bad, smelly place and ripped her dress. We got mad. Cindi made him stop, and I helped. The red stuff that came out of his ears and nose looked like fingerpaint. It took us a long time to walk home, and I was hungry.

Cindi and I are friends. We'll be together forever and ever.

Familiars bond with mages on a magickal level and trade their knowledge and abilities in return for upkeep, companionship and Quintessence. They are in no way subservient to their mage (in fact, they often think of the mage as *their* familiar), and their non-human perspectives frequently prove to be as valuable to their companions as their more concrete abilities. Mages should never forget, however, that familiars have radically different world views. They may see nothing wrong, for instance, in randomly singling out a child to be killed for their amusement. Normal ideas of good and evil, of law and morality, do not apply to these otherworldly spirits made flesh. Mages had best use caution when agreeing to contracts with these beings. They sometimes require extra services or conditions over and above the minimum as rewards for their help. These demands do not always make sense to the mage, but failure to provide them once such is agreed upon breaks the contract as far as the familiar is concerned. On the other hand, mages can find no companions more loyal so long as they fulfill their side of the bargain. Aside from their ability to eat Paradox and provide information, familiars may have other powers such as magickal ability in one Sphere or danger sense.

Familiars may take the forms of animals, computer programs, strange, otherworldly beings or something else altogether. Although each Tradition has its favorite or preferred form for familiars, as a general rule, most of the Tradition mages (with the notable exception of the Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts) tend to have familiars that could pass for natural creatures. Some Tradition mages have more exotic familiars, but these stay in Horizon Realms. Their visits to static reality are,



of necessity, quite brief. A few Technocracy mages may have familiars who are quite similar to those of the Traditions, but for the most part, the spirits they bond with are housed in less natural forms. The Technocracy almost never refers to these spirits as familiars, preferring to call them by some euphemism which better fits their paradigm. Marauder familiars are the strangest of

all, like Abominable Snowmen, fire-breathing dragopedes or a red-spotted Dalmatian that can play a wicked chess game. Nephandi familiars are twisted spirits who serve to corrupt those they serve and those they come in contact with. (More information on familiars can be found in *The Book of Shadows: The Mage Player's Guide*.)

Mage Factions and their Followers



Like attracts like; custos tend to be drawn to (or seized by!) mage factions which travel in similar circles. The general categories below cannot encompass every sort of ally a mage might find, but offer a range of un-Awakened companions for the wizards of your chronicle.

The Council of Nine Traditions

*Here and now are the Mysteries.
Out of no stored and storied past
Of things long lost;
But the breathing moment of time.*

—Doreen Valiente, *The Mysteries*

Tradition mages are as varied in their preferences for familiars, acolytes and consors as they are in all other aspects of life. Mages from each Tradition shape all facets of their lives so that they might work toward Ascension, and their more personal goals, by whatever means best suits their current pet paradigm. Mages attempt to find and create ideal living situations, Horizon Realms and magickal workings. They choose their less magickly adept associates with equal care (or with at least an equivalent amount of attention).

The following information gives an overview of what mages of different Traditions typically look for in their acolytes, consors and familiars. Keep in mind, though, that the only thing truly typical about any mage is her singularity.

Akashic Brotherhood

•Acolytes

The Brotherhood tends to attract those who are looking for enlightenment, but it also gets its share of people who adore old Bruce Lee films. Many are clerks in martial arts, health food and alternative book stores or serve as waitpersons in Chinese or Indian restaurants, especially the ones in which the food is authentic and healthy. The Brothers respect and protect their acolytes.

They neither mistreat them nor coddle them, believing that they will find the way to Ascension through contact with those who seek it. Such companions are not all martial arts proponents, however. The Brotherhood reportedly has a Chantry in which Mayan Indians and followers of the Dalai Lama serve as acolytes.

•Consors

A lot of people make the mistake of thinking the Akashic Brotherhood's consors are just martial arts fanatics. They confuse the means with the ends. It's true they attract certain types, but their consors aren't show-offs who act like they're action movie stars. Mostly they're serious students of Zen or yoga who can achieve amazing results even without magic. Some levitate while meditating or move objects around without touching them. The key is the power of the *mind*. Psychics and diviners fit in well with the Akashics, as do peaceful Umbrood spirits.

•Familiars

The Akashic Brotherhood members tend to rely on themselves and the powers of their own minds, but some few either enjoy the companionship of a familiar or wish to learn what the familiar can teach them. Generally, Akashic familiars are clothed in the shapes of grasshoppers, monkeys and birds. Some are tigers and even llamas. Quetzal birds are popular among the South and Central American Brothers. The more bizarre ones must remain in Horizon Realms most of the time and may be as fantastic as feathered dragons or phoenixes. Akashic Brotherhood familiars are reputed to be chosen from among the wisest spirits.

Celestial Chorus

•Acolytes

The Chorus finds those who try to serve humanity in some way. Soup kitchen workers, young people or old ladies who hand out religious tracts, crusading police officers, social workers, doctors at free clinics and TV evangelists are all prime examples of the sort of person the Chorus likes to recruit. Aside from their humanitarian concerns, most of them have one thing in common — they believe in something outside themselves that gives them a purpose. Whether they are Christian, Jewish, followers of Islam or adherents of the Goddess, all of them

worship a deity which they can associate with the One. Whereas the Akashics go for those who believe in themselves, the Chorus attracts the ones who believe in something *outside* themselves.

• Consors

Many of the Celestial Chorus' consors evince powers of one sort or another. Some of them can't be Dominated by vampires, and many of them have True Faith. They sometimes have psychic powers which they attribute to being chosen by the One. Perhaps they have been. A very few have the power to summon otherworldly beings to their aid. Whether these are angels or not is open to speculation. Some Celestial Chorus consors act as witch-hunters, stalking such evils as vampires and the Nephandi. The hunters know various sorts of lore and ways to deal with their foes and are often armed with "holy" weapons. Bagheera (werepanthers) also love to interact with the Chorus to discuss religion and philosophy and sometimes serve as consors to do so.

• Familiars

Some Celestial Chorus mages are uncomfortable with the idea of familiars, equating them with such things as imps. Others see them as spirit beings that have as great a connection to the One as any human. They tend to prefer white birds (like doves) and lambs (when such wouldn't cause comment), though many find it easiest to summon spirits into dog forms. Their more exotic familiars, those who spend most of their time in Horizon Realms, tend toward winged humanoids reminiscent of angels.

Cult of Ecstasy

• Acolytes

Cult of Ecstasy acolytes believe in having a good time. Just about anyone who's into the entertainment business or devoted to partying might make good Cult material. They aren't simply mindless hedonists, however. Like their mages, they use certain drugs, music or the high they get from acting, dancing and even mountain climbing to alter their consciousness. Musicians, actors, groupies, psychedelics dealers, race car drivers, bungee jumpers and all kinds of thrill-seekers qualify. One thing almost all the Cult's acolytes have in common is their attractiveness. It is as if beauty were one more stimulant.

Though the idea would surprise many outside the Cult, the Ecstasy mages and their followers often practice a rigid code of responsibility and self-discipline. This is not a discipline of denial (far from it!), but foresight and an eye toward the consequences of their behavior. Transcending the boundaries only makes sense if you're around to learn from what you have done. Although the Cult and its custos appear to be mindless pleasure-seekers, there is a method and a code underlying their indulgences.

• Consors

Cult consors are usually like the Cult mages, trying to push the envelope and force people out of their safe little lives. They believe that if you break out of the mundane, whatever is left must be the fantastic. Alternative media folks, performance artists, poets and musicians make good Cult consors. Most of them have some special touch of power which makes them compelling. Some run nightclubs of the more decadent kind; others started the white water rafting craze to scare the bejeezus out of people and wake them up. There are even some vampires that hang out with the Cult; lots of Toreadors get into their music and beauty. They also attract some Bastet (weretcats) who love their sensuousness. Cult mages are quite likely to have Horizon Realm creatures as consors, and those beasties may come complete with their own internal synthesizers and hookahs. Changelings, too, are drawn to Cult mages because of the creativity they can sense within them.

• Familiars

Like many among the Traditions, the Cult of Ecstasy usually confine themselves to familiars that can pass as normal animals. They tend to like ferrets, but have been known to choose boa constrictors and exotic birds. Some Cult mages prefer cats, including big ones such as cheetahs or ocelots, though these are harder to explain to animal protection groups. Those familiars who must remain in Horizon Realms for the better part of their time usually have pleasing, but completely alien, shapes and features. Often they also exude heady perfumes or have melodious voices as well. Many Cult familiars require some special services in return for their bond—special music they must have access to or regular infusions of hallucinogenics, for example.

Dreamspeakers

• Acolytes

People who are attracted to the Dreamspeakers are often those who believe in the guardian spirits of the land or who work to protect the environment. Many of them are into crystals and holistic medicine, aromatherapy, shamanism and tribal beliefs, whether those are American Indian teachings, Aboriginal or African. The Dreamspeakers attract shamans, dancers, drummers, ecologists and such.

• Consors

Dreamspeaker consors are those who see beyond outward trappings in their search for truth. They tend to spearhead environmental movements. Lots of them are movers and shakers in their tribes, working for the return of American Indian artifacts or fighting for African national identity. Many of the Native Americans have popularized pow wows where the drums, chanting, singing and dancing can trance people out and get them wired at the same time.

Qualmi (werelynx) and Pumonca (werecougars) sometimes serve as consors for Dreamspeakers, as do the Balam (werejaguars), who are involved in trying to preserve the South American rain forest. Some Dreamspeaker consors have subtle powers, even more impressive than the Akashics'abilities. Many Umbrood spirits work with the Speakers, and they attract Garou, who work in concert with the Dreamspeakers on behalf of Gaia.

• Familiars

Dreamspeakers prefer their familiars in the shapes of various totem animals. Dogs, wolves, bears, eagles, kangaroo, foxes, snakes and monkeys are all common choices. Those that are more exotic or that the public would consider dangerous are kept quietly in more isolated locations and not paraded around. Dreamspeakers take great pains to keep the familiars who wear the shapes of endangered species out of the limelight, lest the authorities attempt to take them away. Their more exotic familiars assume the guise of white buffalo or thunderbirds or long-extinct animals such as mammoths. While some may exist on earth so long as they are kept hidden, others may only visit occasionally and reside in Horizon Realms.

Euthanatos

• Acolytes

For the most part, Euthanatos followers are people who want to help others to understand the death process. Many of them have what others would consider a morbid interest in death and dying, although mystery writers, psychologists and physicians are as common among the followers of the Euthanatos as are occultists, undertakers, survivalists and hit men.

• Consors

Many people believe that the Euthanatos and their custos are only crazed killers, but nothing could be further from the truth. Euthanatos do not kill on a whim. For them, each death has a purpose and every life is sacred. Euthanatos are the least likely to accept a psychopath among them, for those sick individuals kill for no reason and serve no higher purpose. It is simply a matter of wiping the slate clean when it's time for somebody to let go. Some Euthanatos consors seem concerned with nothing but torture and death, but others are the most compassionate people you'll ever meet. Some consors are active in the right-to-die movement, and attorneys among them have become specialists in helping people obtain and implement living wills. Others are the forensics experts who work with the police, but help the Euthanatos cover their tracks, and the performance artists staging death-plays to help people come to terms with their fear of death. A few Euthanatos even attract vampires and ghosts, the Awakened dead.

Bastet (Werecats)

It is extremely rare for werecats to be companions to mages, so it is a fortunate mage indeed who has a Bastet as a consor. It is doubtful that they see themselves in the sidekick role, however. Bastet consider themselves to be "the eyes of Gaia" and believe that She created them to oversee her human children. Watchful and curious, the Bastet are ever fascinated by the inventiveness of humanity. Their inquisitiveness and love of diversion are their main reasons for associating with mages, along with their penchant for sensuousness (they love being petted and stroked and revel in new sensations).

Bastet see their association with mages as educational. They believe they have the divine right to know everything and unearth all secrets, while revealing little of what they know to non-Bastet. These fascinating creatures are graceful, vain and independent. They greatly value cleanliness and are fastidious about their grooming. For the most part, they are solitary, staking claim to their own territories and defending them against interlopers. They meet during full moons at gatherings called *taghairm*. There they sing, tell tales and exchange all the juicy information they've gathered since the last meeting. Gossip among themselves is considered a high art, and good dirt is likely to garner much fame.

Each Bastet has her own Den-Realm, the only place where she may freely pass through the Gauntlet. Bastet cannot step sideways as Garou do unless they possess the Gift: **Walking Between Worlds**. The territory each claims in her Den-Realm extends to the portion of the Penumbra which surrounds her claimed earthly den.

There are (or were) nine tribes of Bastet, though one of them, the Ceilican of northern Europe and Britain, has supposedly been destroyed. They are the Bagheera (Panther), the Balam (Jaguar), the Bubasti (Egyptian), Khan (Tiger), Pumonca (Cougar), Simba (Lion), Swara (Cheetah) and Qualmi (Lynx). They are found throughout the world in their native habitats, though all Bastet are rare. Bagheera are sages; Balam currently defend the South American rain forests, and Bubasti are thought by many to be extinct. Khan passionately hate and hunt humans for decimating their tiger cousins and destroying their habitat. Pumonca interact with Native American cultures and Uktena Garou. Simba are the only Bastet who live in groups (or prides) and were originally to have led catkind. Swara were once the messengers of the Bastet and tend to be shy and nervous, while Qualmi practice cat and human hedge magick and breed exclusively with Native Americans. They have several powers and Gifts as well as their own Rites. More complete information on the Bastet and other kinds of changing creatures can be found in *The Werewolf Players Guide*.

• Familiars

The Euthanatos' familiar spirits tend to be of the darker sort. They like creatures such as black dogs, rats, snakes and birds. The most popular shape for Euthanatos familiars is that of a raven or crow. Many of these spirits require the sacrifice of some smaller creature (a mouse, for example) to them as both food and spiritual sustenance. Their stranger spirits may be quite fantastic, assuming shapes which are capable of dealing out death. They can be quite varied, with some that may resemble the Creature from the Black Lagoon, while others assume a form like that of Kali, the Hindu goddess of death.

Order of Hermes

• Acolytes

Acolytes for the Order of Hermes tend toward secrecy. They love mystickal, magickal languages and symbols. They are mathematicians, occultists like the Order of the Golden Dawn, Freemasons and other secret societies untainted by the Nephandi and people who like playing with codes and formulas — scientists, cryptographers or those who like to work the puzzles in the newspaper. Many of their most trusted acolytes are old family retainers whose ancestors have kept the mages' households in order for generations.

• Consors

The Order attracts spies and unusually secretive people or those who tend to think and speak in codes or metaphors. Influential Talmudic scholars, lawyers and alchemist-types love being part of the Order. Scientists, pure theorists who only speak mathematics and scienceese, that don't join the Technocracy or the Sons of Ether slip in with them too. The Order also seems to get paramilitary sorts for some reason. Some Bagheera, the werepanther sages of Bastet, serve as their consors, probably because the Order based a lot of their magickal formulae on ancient Egyptian magick.

• Familiars

The spirits who respond to Order of Hermes mages' calls tend to think in symbols. They are among the most intelligent and well-informed familiars, but can be difficult to understand. Even when the mage believes she has plumbed the depths of meaning in her familiar's cryptic remarks, she may have been too literal or not literal enough in her interpretation. These familiars almost always require access to magickal tomes in return for their services. Non-black cats, owls, goats, frogs and snakes are favorite forms for familiars, though pot-bellied pigs are gaining in popularity as they become acceptable as household pets. Many of the Order's stranger familiars such as lamasu, sphinxes and griffins are confined to their Horizon Realms where they cause no Paradox.



JOHNSON

Sons of Ether

• Acolytes

Contrary to popular belief, not all Sons of Ether acolytes are earnest young men with pocket protectors and glasses taped in the middle. There are a few such among them, those who haven't been recruited by the Technocracy. Not all of them look like nerds, though. The six footer who is built like a Neanderthal, works on cars, and talks nothing but autojargon is one. So is the gorgeous girl who speaks of quantum physics like she invented it (maybe she did). Anybody who's interested in inventions and science and eccentric theories fits right in with the Sons. Never underestimate the power of somebody who can earn a Ph.D! Some of the Sons are unable to work well with living servitors or feel uneasy in social situations. These tend to build their own acolytes, robots programmed to perform certain functions and who don't bother the mage with undesired chatter.

• Consors

Just like the mages themselves, their consors are usually tinkerers. All of them love to play with gadgets and try to build balloon cars, thought meters and mind rays. Lots of psychics end up as their consors, if only because the Sons are the ones acting as parapsychologists. They are editors of alternative science magazines, chaos theorists and inventors. They have also constructed more advanced robots to act as their consors, either serving as walking reference libraries or acting as security forces. Computerizing systems in cars was thought up by the Sons and the Virtual Adepts working in tandem as a way to provide them with mobile consors. The ones they've made are far superior to what most folks can get. Some of their consors are television people who have been backing shows that feature computerized and sentient cars and futuristic computer companions.

• Familiars

The Sons summon the weirdest spirits and Umbrood types. These seem to be almost as inventive as the mages they bond to. Various types of robot bodies are usually made available to them, and some mages go so far as to make cars, brooms and even items of apparel for their familiar spirits to inhabit. A few Sons create more natural forms such as dogs or cats for their familiars, but most prefer to house their spirit companions within strange machinery of some sort. Weird monster and alien types are another favorite form, though these must stay in Horizon Realms or cause great Paradox if spotted by Sleepers.

Verbena

• Acolytes

Witches, Wiccans and New Agers tend to hang out with the Verbena. Lots of them are fine holistic or herbal healers, and a lot are just good ol' country people. Many are very down to earth, full of common sense and folk wisdom. What seems

to distinguish them from other people is that they demand freedom. Most are independent thinkers who don't let society dictate how they will live.

• Consors

Whereas the acolytes focus on the freedom to be had with the Verbena, their consors are somewhat more informed. They're all very much into life. Surgeons and chemists that aren't Technocracy tainted sometimes find the Verbena to their liking. A lot of the recent popularity of holistic medicine and Chinese herbalism was started by Verbena consors. Nudists tend to fit right in, and pharmacists and midwives make good recruits. Certain teachers and lawyers reach a lot of young people and infect them with ideas of individual freedom and liberties. Some werecats enjoy associating with them, especially those Verbena with cat-type familiars. A few changelings and mythical beasts from the Umbra find that they are compatible with Verbena as well. The scariest consor on record was created by a particularly powerful Verbena who'd lost his mind. He apparently woke up on the wrong side of the bed and animated a blood-drenched tree that acted as his bodyguard for a time.

• Familiars

Verbena tend to prefer cats as their chosen shape for familiar spirits. Most choose black, though a few like white, calico, orange or grey cats. Other favored shapes include crows, owls, mice, dogs, sheep and goats. Some few create horse familiars. Among their more exotic familiars are those that resemble unicorn, pegasi, leprechauns and brownies. These usually serve from Horizon Realms, but may occasionally cross into static reality for brief periods to inspire children and fantasists.

Virtual Adepts

• Acolytes

Move over, Mr. Data! Virtuals tend to attract science fiction fans in droves. Most of them want to find out what it's like to make love in virtual reality. Hackers, computer game players and anybody who likes computerized gadgets fits in with the Adepts. Some people who are on computer bulletin boards exchange information that is useful to the Adepts and never realize they are serving as their acolytes.

• Consors

Adept consors tend to be computer programmers and designers. Many of them design intricate security programs, while others concentrate on creating computer games which stretch people's imaginations and open them up to new possibilities. They also have an entire network of consors that they meet online in BBSs. Those could be anybody and do anything. Certain Garou help them out occasionally, and some more primitive AIs also serve them as consors. The Virtual Adepts have also profited from a joint venture with the Sons of Ether which produced some very sophisticated computerized cars — in effect traveling consors.

• Familiars

Virtual Adept spirit contacts tend to be "ghosts in the machine," super-enhanced programs or AIs. They are not always found within computers, however. Adepts tend to computerize their living quarters, and their safety might be overseen by a quite sentient and powerful spirit housed within the security system. They even manage to carry familiars with them in the form of pocket calculators and laptops. A few Adepts work with familiars in more normal forms like dogs and cats, but they are the minority. Their more fantastic spirits tend toward the truly alien, being beams of light or concentric rings of sparkling motes or shaped much like computer icons. Whenever these cross into the real world, they do so by means of the virtual realities created by the Adepts.

The Orphans and the Lost Tradition

*Some come dark and strange like dying
Crows and ravens whistling
Lines of weeping, strings of crying
So much said in listening
Songs to aging children come
Aging children, I am one.*

— Joni Mitchell, "Songs to Aging Children Come"

Orphans attract followers just like Tradition mages do, but many more Orphan acolytes and consors tend to be real outsiders than those who join with the Council of Nine. Many are self-taught, some pursue individual occult theories, and some would never be thought of as material for acolytes (junkies, bag ladies) or consors (gang members, sewer maintenance workers). Orphan familiars are usually related in some way to the type of magick the Orphan practices. An Orphan who utilizes his computer might attract an AI's attention, while another who leans heavily toward Akashic Brotherhood teachings may keep wild songbirds like nightingales. Other familiars could simply follow the mage home. Mice inhabiting the corner of the occult shop, eagles, crickets, dolphins, a friend's boa constrictor, iguanas, the stray cat the Orphan feeds out of compassion or even the family pet are all potential material.

Although the Hollow Ones are by no means the only Orphans, they are the best-known faction. Their custos, while leaning a little heavily toward the outré, are fairly representative.

Hollow Ones

• Acolytes

Hollow Ones find the Traditions too moribund. They know life sucks, but party anyway. They Awakened on their own and don't owe anybody anything. Anyone who wants to party with them is welcome to join. Blood dolls, artists, runaways and punks can all be found serving as acolytes for the Hollow Ones. They take care of themselves and don't

seem to fit in anywhere else. The Hollow Ones respect the abilities and individuality of their acolytes. Most of them feel it is all pointless, but they may as well go out in style.

• Consors

Hollow Ones are into vampires, ghosts and anything else that can show them a few new truths. They draw those who like to take risks. A lot of their people are artists of one sort or another, musicians, writers, dancers or fashion designers who have influence in their fields. Club owners, performance artists and any sort of cutting edge types are welcome. Mostly, though, they are just friends of the mages who have a few skills beyond cooking or putting another CD on.

• Familiars

Orphans, particularly Hollow Ones, pick up familiars that are similar to those the Traditions prefer, though strange ones such as imaginary playmates are not unheard of. They tend to like "spooky" things, going for black cats, rats and ravens. Some prefer tarantulas. The Umbrood types they call up are extraordinarily Gothic.

Ahl-i-Batin

• Acolytes

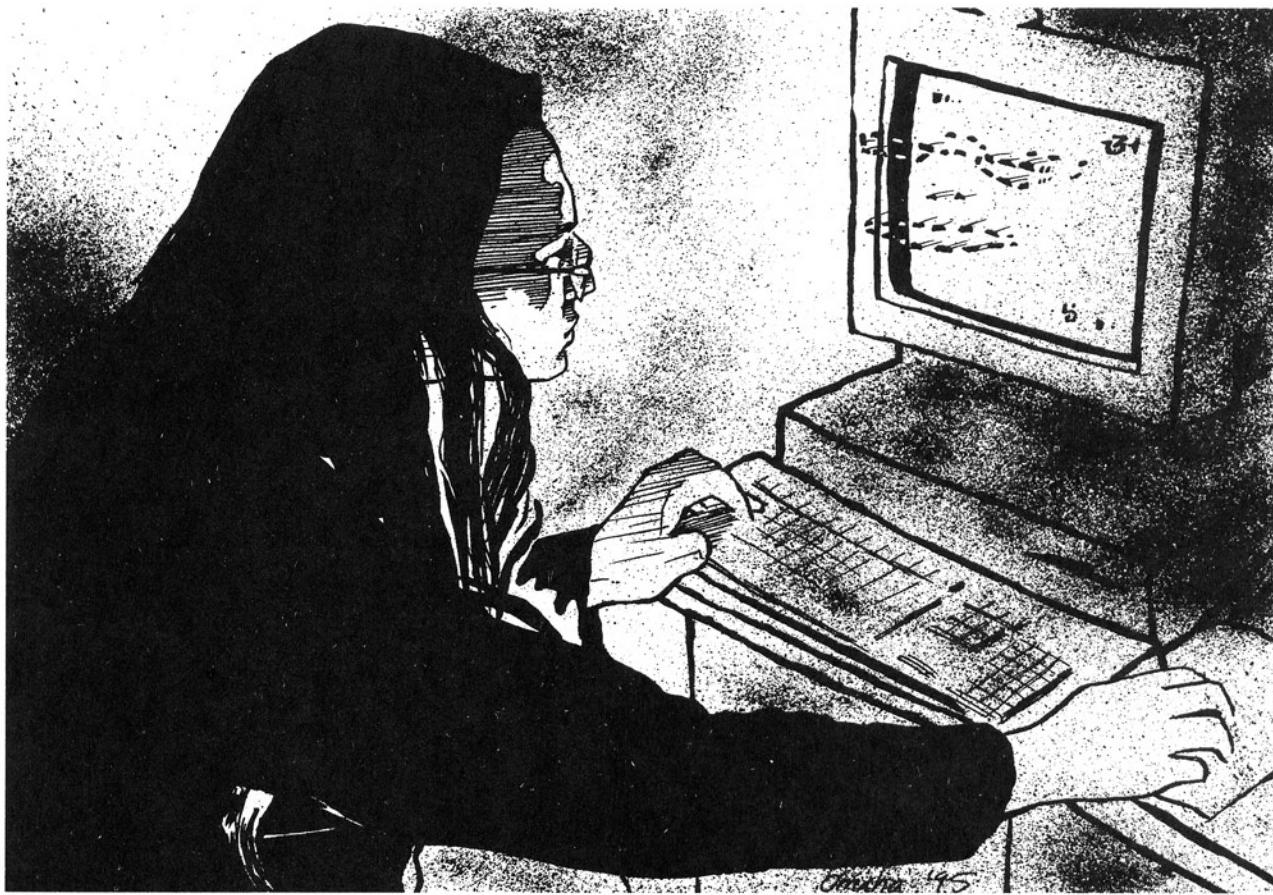
Most Ahl-i-Batin acolytes come from families who have served their mage masters for generations — sometimes without knowing they serve mages at all. They are very traditional and hold their positions to be ones of great import, as they must serve their masters' needs, yet remain discreet in all matters. Many acolytes seek service with those they perceive to be holy men to purify their hearts and minds. While some are humble servants or beggars, others such as doctors, holy men and scholars all know of the wisdom of prayer and the ancient ways.

• Consors

The Ahl-i-Batin were once part of the Traditions, but were lost to them long ago. Only recently has contact between them been reestablished. Holy men and scholars from various Islamic sects, a few assassins and professional soldiers all serve the Ahl-i-Batin. Discretion is counted highly. They were once great proponents of mind magic, and psychics are drawn to them because of their knowledge in this area.

• Familiars

In general, Ahl-i-Batin are somewhat hesitant when dealing with familiars, for many remember the raw chaos of the Marauders and their djinn companions. Those who do accept familiars (or who are accepted by them) are much like the Traditions in their choice to house the spirits within the forms of natural-seeming animals like goats, sheep or camels. Rumor has it that they also make golems. Their more exotic familiars take the shape of rocs and giant tigers. It is said that they are able to exist for longer periods of time in static reality because more Arab people still believe in such things. It is also theorized that they remain longer because anyone seeing one of them simply believes she is experiencing a hallucination brought on by the desert's heat.



The Technocracy

By reminding us of our deep cosmic ignorance, science — far from dulling the mystery of existence — sharpens it the way garlic wafting on the evening breeze whets your appetite. It reminds us that we dwell in a mystery that is ultimately more to be savored than solved.

—Dennis Overbye, Time

Gentlemen and ladies, it has come to our attention that recruitment among the unenlightened has recently begun to slip. We all know how busy we are with our various projects, but without adequate assistance, none of us shall succeed. We are in dire need of more household servants, lab assistants, factory workers, clerks, computer operators, guards, receptionists and so on. Aside from their value in these areas, those selected will serve as unwitting control groups for many of our ongoing projects. Our need for more highly trained operatives is also great.

You have been chosen from among our operatives to recruit those whose services we need. We anticipate that you will be able to persuade 85.6% of those you approach so long as you utilize care in selecting those you contact. To

assist you in doing so, I have composed a memo with a few observations concerning our most likely prospects. Please read and initial it to show that you have absorbed the material in it. Congratulations on your new appointments.

To the Technocracy, allies and followers fall into the “favored servant” role. As the Technocrats are chosen to protect and help humanity, their more mundane helpers are lesser partners in this magnificent enterprise. There is a great distinction between drones and allies in the Technocracy mindset; while the former are naturally good citizens, the latter are more desirable when real work needs to be done.

Nearly all allies are regarded as security risks by the higher ranks of leadership. Tasks and information given to the unenlightened are on a “need-to-know” basis. This is not to say that Technomancer allies are treated badly; most are given rewards commensurate with their usefulness and loyalty. Those who betray that trust, however, are relegated to Horizon Realm workpits and laboratories. There, they can continue to serve the greater good while suffering the punishment they deserve.



Memo to Recruiters

From: J.B. Cullington, Regional HQ, NWO

The New World Order has gathered this information in an attempt to assist our fellow Conventions in acquiring new staff. It is hoped that by heeding the suggestions contained herein, overlap will be minimized and efficiency maintained. The following are the most likely prospects for recruitment into our Convention control groups. They have been separated into target groups as technicians and operatives for your convenience:

Iteration X

• Technicians

People who are interested in computer technology and cybernetics are naturally of great interest to Iteration X. Such may be found at almost any university or computer store. Recruitment efforts might also be extended to those who appreciate different kinds of high tech devices and weapons. Science fiction fans who are attracted to hard science and cyberfiction also make excellent recruits, provided they have not been infected with the fantasies and delusions of the kind which spawned the Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether. Computer operators and programmers are preferred. Maids and janitors are needed for some locations, and security guards are required to staff several new facilities. Each candidate must be either bondable or capable of receiving a security clearance (though they will, of course, not be told the true extent of their work). Often, a talented individual with the potential to serve Iteration X is found among those who fancy a job in which they believe they are privy to secrets. Remember that they must be capable of strictly following orders. Iteration X will tolerate no mavericks.

• Operatives

Mechanical engineers and computer designers of both hard- and software are primary targets for recruitment as operatives. Additionally, those with physical handicaps who might be improved by Iteration X's cybernetic replacements should be vigorously pursued. Anyone who evinces psychic powers should immediately be reported to the Convention. Operatives are instructed not to contact these persons directly. There is no need for recruitment operatives to investigate non-human sources such as Artificial Intelligences. Iteration X would, however, be interested in hearing of any AIs that are found as a result of your more mundane investigations.

New World Order

• Technicians

It should be obvious that the New World Order is most interested in those who can gather information, but not spread it to the wrong ears. Statisticians, poll takers, credit bureau clerks, "snitches" and bondable household servants are the first choices. Security guards, historians and those who enjoy cracking the codes found in newspapers are other possible targets. Remember that it is not enough that recruits be capable of gathering and processing information; they must also be discreet. Again, we accept only those who can follow orders precisely. In all cases, it is best if the candidates are not told anything of the actual nature of the New World Order. If they believe they are working for the government and think that what they know might compromise national security, so much the better.

• Operatives

Experts in computer languages, foreign languages and statistical analysis are our primary targets for the moment. Espionage agents, undercover police officers, private investigators, experts in surveillance media and special forces trainees are likewise sought for immediate recruitment. Fortune tellers who show signs of genuine ability to predict the future should be immediately brought to the Convention's attention. As always, discretion is a must.

The Progenitors

• Technicians

The Progenitors need people who can act as lab assistants, watching over minor experiments in progress, cleaning equipment, mixing chemicals and performing general tasks which call for repetition more than insight. Chemistry and pre-med students who show no signs of brilliance, even bartenders, are all possible targets. In addition, the Progenitors are looking for hardy genetic types to serve as security and servants. Don't overlook gang members or addicts who might be recruited in return for drugs, runaways who will cooperate in return for shelter and food or animals that might serve as guards once they are properly enhanced.

• Operatives

Gifted surgeons and medical researchers should be recruited for the Progenitors immediately. Pharmacists, drug designers, biologists, chemists and geneticists are desired recruits as well. Pure genetic types are needed to "assist" with experiments in progress. Criminals who volunteer for medical experiments could serve in this capacity as well.

The Syndicate

• Technicians

CPAs, bank tellers, loan officers, store clerks and anyone else who knows how to handle money is of interest to the Syndicate. They prefer to recruit their support staff such as maids, guards, secretaries and such from those who have fallen into arrears on loans, have overextended themselves with their credit cards, or who are overdrawn at the bank. Additionally, they are seeking enforcer-types: bruisers, football players, brawlers at the local bar. Any of these might be of use.

• Operatives

The Syndicate is most interested in acquiring the services of members of crime families and organizations, corporate officers and professional financial consultants. Experts in security systems, prison guards, gang members and mercenaries should be secondary targets. Finally, media personnel such as journalists, admen and television programmers could be canvassed as well.

Void Engineers

• Technicians

Though they themselves have only requested "volunteers for experimental voyages," we have taken the liberty of also requesting general household staff and guards to serve as technicians for the Void Engineers. Aside from reckless thrill-seekers, explorer positions might attract cartographers, space exploration buffs and UFO enthusiasts. The more mundane staff may be found almost anywhere, but must believe that they are working for NASA or some such agency.

• Operatives

Aerospace engineers and astronomers head the Void Engineer's list of desired operatives. Investigate the possibilities in anyone involved in the space industry such as theorists or radio astronomers or in manufacturing optical magnifiers or space probes. Additionally, highly-trained security personnel are needed.

Please be advised that recruitment operatives are not to bother Convention members in order to gain access to Horizon Realm creatures. These will be dealt with directly by the leaders of each Construct.

General note: All Conventions desire charismatic, inspirational and resourceful individuals to serve as recruitment operatives.

Thank you for your cooperation. Initial below.

Memo to: the Triumvirate
From: J.B. Callington, Regional HQ NWD
Re: Recruitment of acolytes, memo

As indicated in my initial proposal to you, I have instituted a wide-ranging recruitment program utilizing some of our most persuasive and charismatic operatives. Naturally, should any of them show less than total commitment to our cause or a penchant for divulging secret information to the masses, the rank and file or our enemies, they will be "reassigned" permanently. As was noted during our last conference, our assistance in recruiting for all Conventions has allowed us to place our own operatives within the others' Constructs with a 72.5% probability that they will remain undetected for up to a year. This further effort should better that percentage due to the high caliber of the agents we may utilize. Please advise me of any changes you'd like to see made in the above document.

J.B.

Technocracy Familiars

The Technocracy have few natural-seeming familiars. Of these, the Progenitors make clones of normal creatures and genetically enhance them, while the New World Order utilizes black dogs that follow the Men in Black. These are known as "special bonded operatives."

The Syndicate is generally leery of familiars, fearing that they will not be able to control them and will thereby throw a wild card into their plans. Nonetheless, some have familiars that can serve well as spies, such as rats. Not surprisingly, they call them "information specialists." Iteration X utilizes the same sorts of special programs and AIs as the Virtual Adepts. Neither the Adepts nor Iteration X realizes that their familiars regularly exchange information, since they see no particular difference between the two sides. Iteration X's familiars are known as "conceptuals."

The Void Engineers clothe their familiars in truly alien flesh. Many are patterned after the short, bald aliens with the large heads, small mouths and big eyes popularized by *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. These in turn were based on the Void Engineer's familiars, who are regularly spotted by people living in remote areas. Often, these familiars demand the right to kidnap humans and experiment on them as part of their contract with the Engineers. This may account for the number of UFO kidnapping "I-was-experimented-on-by-aliens" stories prevalent among certain tabloids. These familiars are called "aliens."

The Nephandi

Because I'm evil. I thought you would have figured that out by now.

— Baron Orloch, Transylvania 6-5000

"Line up!" He checked out the new recruits as they fell in and formed a ragged line. A couple of them looked like real prospects. Maybe they'd done a couple of years in ROTC or read Soldier of Fortune magazine. One or two looked like gangers who'd decided to go their own way. The rest were the usual sorry-ass wimps he hated almost as much as the goddamn niggers and kikes. He strutted back and forth in front of them. He was particularly fond of the way he looked in his black uniform and boots. With his hairless head, it made him look tough and almost regal.

"This is the Proving Ground. If you ain't ready, you got no business bein' here. Now you may think you'll just ease on into your training. Get that out of your minds right now. This here is a war. You're the soldiers. We gotta clean this country up. The damn niggers and kikes have the government by the balls, and they're squeezin' hard, but we're here to change all that. We're here to take America back for the real Americans." He stopped and looked them over, willing just one of them to try to speak or cough, waiting for the opportunity to show them who was in charge.

"I'm called Body Count. I earned my name. If you want to be a part of us, each of you is gonna have to earn a name for himself. We're about to let you do that. Any o' you girls too sensitive for this line of work better speak up."



A few of them shifted uncomfortably, but no one left the line.

"Arright. Now we're all gonna have a little test. Step over to the supply depot, and grab a weapon. They're loaded, so watch your asses. Now down at the end of the field, you may see some targets we've set up. We're gonna go practice shootin' right now. If you ain't never done that, you're gonna learn—fast. So march, double quick time. Run, you sorry mothers!" he screamed.

After half an hour getting used to their weapons, he judged they were ready.

"That's enough!" he yelled, moving down the line until all had stopped. He pointed to a covered truck making its way toward them. "Here comes the real fun."

The truck pulled up, and Body Count opened the canvas in the rear. Inside sat three black children. The youngest was a little boy about six years old. He had a pinched face and huge brown eyes. The middle child looked about seven or eight. He was round, with pudgy hands, short, sausage-like legs and fat cheeks. The eldest, a girl who might have been nine, had the sort of delicate look Body Count liked. He wished there were time for other things than the hunt today and briefly regretted the lost opportunity. He manhandled them out of the truck, roughly tossing them into the dirt. The youngest began to cry.

"Shut up!" he yelled, kicking the child. He looked around to see the recruits' reactions. A few looked tense, like they knew they should stop this, but didn't really want to. Some looked excited as they realized what was about to happen. One was frowning. He noted the frowner, then turned to the children. The girl had put an arm around the smaller boy. The child shivered, but dared not make a sound.

"Now," Body Count said, "we're gonna play a little game. You three are gonna run across this field and head for those woods. We're gonna give you a three minute start. Then we're coming after you. Run!"

The children stood for a moment as if they couldn't believe what was happening, then the girl tugged on the smaller boy's hand and they took off running. The round boy goggled at Body Count's gun as he pulled it out and pointed it at him.

"I said run, nigger, or I'll kill you right here."

A few of the recruits snickered as Body Count yelled, "Lookit 'em go! Just like coons!"

"We're not seriously supposed to hunt down and kill those kids, are we?"

Just like he'd figured, the frowner was a weenie.

"Well, hell, no," Body Count crooned. "At least, you aren't." He shuddered orgasmically as he leveled his gun at the frowner and shot him between the eyes.

"Any other objections?" he asked. "No? Then let's go hunt some coon."

The followers and allies of the Fallen Ones tend to either cater to the demented corruption of their masters or fall beneath their lash. These allies are often sick in some way — physically, mentally or spiritually unwell. This sickness is not always obvious, but might be noticed by the perceptive or wise.



Acolytes

The acolytes of these corrupt mages are either dupes or slaves. For the most part, individual members of either group are completely unimportant to the Nephandi. They are cannon fodder that provides some slight amusement while they live. In groups, they are useful tools to be used as needed and discarded when broken.

Dupes: The Nephandi work best when they hide their influence by controlling Sleeper groups (who are referred to as dupes or stooges). Such diverse groups as Satanists, neo-Nazis, the KKK, certain secret societies around the world and even some Masonic lodges serve as dupes for the Nephandi. For the most part, the mages are content to allow their stooges to spout their homegrown views and perform their various rituals (whether sacrificing chickens to Satan or beating up Jews in the name of Hitler) without overt interference. Changes are brought about over time by insinuating "guides" among them who subtly corrupt the groups they join and bring them closer to furthering Nephandi goals. Dupes who begin asking too many questions often disappear and become slaves.

Slaves: Slaves usually have few talents that the Nephandi would find useful. Healthy bodies which can endure physical punishment and long hours of menial work are the primary criteria by which they are chosen. Of secondary importance is any vestige of innocence which might be corrupted or destroyed. Slaves rarely have the ability to become mages, though many who are chosen think of themselves as being "special" in some way. Those who play with ouija boards, groove to Satanic music, hold séances or follow strange, mystic cults or religions qualify for slave status. Of course, anyone can become a slave; the qualifications aren't stringent. They are as likely to choose those who attend church regularly and volunteer their time to teach disadvantaged kids. There is no safety in goodness and nowhere to hide if the Nephandi want you. Literally anyone who can be kidnapped or enticed into accompanying a Nephandi slaver is a potential recruit.

Slaves are used to perform menial labor in Nephandi labyrinths. They are kept in line with mental domination or brute force. They are the lowest of the low and highly expendable. As an amusement for their masters, slaves are allowed to realize all the details of their situation while being prevented from doing anything to change it. Aside from their chores, many are kept by individual mages as sex slaves and subjected to every imaginable kind of humiliation and torture, "just for practice." Those are the lucky ones. Some are earmarked for use as toys or sacrifices for the mages' Nephandi masters.

There are three main groups of Nephandi. Each prefer slightly different sorts of dupes and slaves.

Infernalists: These Nephandi make pacts with the demon hordes of the Astral Umbra. They generally prefer Satanic cults and their attendant heavy metal hordes as





JOHNSON

dupes, although they also enjoy seducing mystic religious cults into following their practices. Favored slaves are those who are hardy enough to endure prolonged torment or who are innocent or corruptible to be given as gifts to fulfill parts of the infernalists' pacts with the demons.

Malfeans: Malfeans serve corruption itself. Their preferred dupes are irresponsible developers, businessmen, politicians and special interest groups. They are usually blind to the greater good in their selfish and narrow vision of the world and so corrupt that they don't care where their money comes from. Slaves are chosen from among their most vocal opponents or from those who will be little missed (winos, addicts, homeless and runaways).

Outsiders: Those who serve these incomprehensible entities who inhabit the Deep Umbra use power-hungry, greedy people as their dupes. Promising wealth or advancement, they organize them into cults whose primary function is to perform rituals and sacrifices. These rites are designed to test out ways of breaking down the barriers which prevent the Nephandi-Lords from entering the world and tearing reality to shreds. Their secondary function is to recruit people in decision-making positions in city, state or national government to their cause.

Nephandi Consors

Regardless of which group the Nephandi belong to, all find the following the most useful as consors:

Corrupters: Corrupters are usually leaders of lunatic-fringe political parties, extremist factions, particularly virulent survivalists or hate-mongering evangelists. Having been corrupted by the Nephandi, they are encouraged in their particular brand of hate and sent to gather new members. Funded by the Nephandi, they are often manipulated by plants among their converts, who whip up righteous fervor among the rank and file.

Fellow Travelers: These are the Umbral creatures and supernatural allies of the Nephandi. They might be lesser demons or Banes sent to assist the Nephandi or attracted by their work, or weird, incomprehensible and disgusting creatures who offer their services for unknown reasons. Vampires, in particular Sabbat who follow the Path of Evil Revelations, often ally themselves with Nephandi, as do the corrupt Garou known as Black Spiral Dancers.

Nephandi Familiars

The Nephandi have weird and twisted Umbral creatures as their familiars. Usually the more hideous they are, the more power they have. Nephandi-Lords must give their permission before those under them may have familiars. In many cases, the Lord calls for a specific type of creature to answer the summons.

A significant number of Nephandi familiars are bizarre beings that seem to embody the forces of entropy and decay. Often these entities can hasten decay, cause the cessation of growth, or otherwise produce entropic effects in others. It is believed that some of these familiars may even feed on this process, thriving at the lowest, most chaotic point of the universal cycle. Regardless of the truth of this assertion, there is little doubt that most Nephandi familiars only remain familiars for as long as they are allowed to play their perverse games of deterioration and decay. Some may, in fact, be minor demons. In all cases, however, the familiar serves to further corrupt the Nephandi to whom it owes allegiance, just as surely as it corrupts the Nephandi's foes.

Marauders

And it's hi ho hey, I am the bold marauder
And its hi ho hey, I am the white destroyer
For I will show you silver and gold, and I will bring you treasure
I will wave a widowing flag, and I will be your lover
And I will show you grotto and cave and sacrificial altar
And I will show you blood on the stone, and I will be your mentor
And night will be our darling, and fear will be our name.
— Richard Farina, "Bold Marauder"

"Would you like some more tea, mum?" I realized I was holding a lovingly polished silver teapot over the diminutive, white-haired lady's rose pattern teacup. I was wearing a maid's uniform with a starched white apron, a matching cap and sensible shoes. My hair was pulled severely back into a bun. This was strange because I had thought I was wearing jeans and viewing Whistler's Mother, which was currently on loan at our local museum. Now I seemed to be talking to this weird old lady.

"Oh, that would be delightful, Annie," she answered in her cultured British accent, crinkling her lined face into what she probably believed was a winning smile.

I started to say My name isn't Annie, it's Rebecca, but what came out was, "Cream and sugar, mum?"

"Yes, please, Annie," she replied, "And remember to bring out a cup for Donald. He'll be joining me today."

What the hell is going on here? Am I losing my mind? I try to formulate the words to express my confusion. Instead I drop a curtsey (I've never curteyed in my life!) and say, "Very good, mum." Jeez, now I'm British too!

The tall blond man in tennis whites strolling across the lawn must be Donald. He looks a little like her. Maybe he's her son.

"Hello, mother!" he calls out cheerily, confirming my guess. "What a lovely day to take tea outdoors. Mind if I join you?"





Omaha '95

I head over to a wheeled cart upon which is set out various tea paraphernalia and scoop up another cup and saucer. Are those scones on that plate? I've never seen a scone before. And what are those atrocious-looking little green sandwich things?

I wipe my hands on my jeans, and the painting seems to float just inches in front of me. What painting? Trousers? I'm in my uniform. What nonsense is this? Jerking myself back to reality from my silly daydreaming, I take the cup and saucer over to Mr. Donald. "Here you are, sir" I say in my less cultured accent. "Get a spot of tea in you, and things'll be right as rain! Not going off to the war after all, sir?" I ask as I briskly bring the scones and cucumber sandwiches to the table.

"No, Annie," the mistress answers, her dear face dimpling with relief. "Donald has acceded to my wishes and will be remaining here with us."

"That's splendid, sir," I say as I pour cream into his cup and add the two sugars he always takes, "We would have missed you terribly had you gone." We exchange smiles all around, content for the moment to enjoy the idyllic, green fields of England.

The tiny old woman quietly slipped out of the museum, followed by the hollow-eyed, jeans-clad girl whose name tag read "Rebecca."

Like their Fallen brethren, the Mad Ones tend to attract and hold allies and servants who fit in well with their general dementia and visionary nature. Such allies favor dynamic changes in their personality and environment and exemplify, inwardly or outwardly, some dramatic departure from the everyday world.

Acolytes

Many Marauders keep no acolytes. Why would a whirlwind need a maid? And who's going to tell the guy slinging balls of lightning around while riding on a winged snake that he needs someone to protect his domicile? Those Marauders who have acolytes usually have one of three types:

Caretakers: Family members, lovers and friends sometimes care for the Marauder's day-to-day needs, either on earth (if the Marauder is very unobtrusive) or in whatever realm within the Umbra that the Marauder calls home. Some live within the dream-reality that the Marauder's madness creates, while others never enter that state, but wash, clothe, feed and try to talk to their forgetful loved ones. Those who fulfill this particular role may find that their ministrations are never even acknowledged.

Spear-Carriers: Spear-carriers (also known as "bit players") may be drawn from among care-givers or recruited (on purpose or by accident) when the Marauder interacts with them. Many of them are given to daydreaming or evince interest in art, drama, poetry or any sort of diversion which opens the mind to imagination, such as gaming. These people assume minor roles (called spear-carriers among actors) within the Marauder's madness, acting out the parts assigned to them and ultimately coming to believe in the reality themselves. Some fill roles which are totally unfamiliar to them, but which fit the personal world of the Marauder and strengthen its reality. Others are chosen because they already live the role they are chosen to fill and it is simple for the Marauder to coopt them for her own use. Some spear-carriers buy into the Marauder's insanity so thoroughly that they actively seek to maintain it and act as shock troops during assaults on the Gauntlet.

Jesters: These non-Awakened beings know about the Ascension War and the Marauders' place in it. They work to bring about opportunities for Marauder penetration of the Gauntlet by fostering imagination, fantasy and altered states of consciousness. Anyone from performers at medieval fairs to fiction writers to storytellers to drug pushers might be Jesters. Game designers also fit in this category.

Consors

Those who have greater powers or possess useful talents may become consors. In some cases, this talent is merely the existence of their own insanity, which combines nicely with that of the marauder. They usually fall into two categories:

Madmen: Such is the strength of some Marauder Quiets that they infect others nearby. Those who have come under the influence of a Marauder's madness and lived to tell of it, yet who have not been drawn completely into the Marauder's reality, are called madmen. Despite the masculine name, there are as many madwomen as men. They serve to anchor weak spots in the Gauntlet which can be ripped more easily. Often, they become quite good friends with the Marauders, who find easy access to static reality through the madmen's similar perceptions. Madmen accept whatever the Marauders do as perfectly natural and may even convince others that this is so. They can be found in insane asylums and homeless shelters, wandering the streets, breaking and entering, teaching history....

Playmates: Playmates are weird Umbral critters and beings who interact with and accompany Marauders on their forays into static reality. They come in all shapes and sizes and often possess powers which can cause great confusion or damage to those who oppose them. Faeries are rumored to be among those whom the Marauders call playmates, and they are occasionally accompanied by werecreatures other than Garou.



Marauder Familiars

Marauders only have familiars when their personal paradigm calls for it. They tend to be the most outrageous familiars conceivable, both in form and powers, or else they become a natural part of the Marauder's Quiet and are almost unnoticeable. Marauders call familiars whatever they feel like calling them.

Individual Marauders are either the least likely or the most likely of all mages to have familiars. Although this seems paradoxical (and with Marauders may well be paradoxical!), it does make a perverse kind of sense. The Marauders' self-oriented pursuit of individual Ascension invariably means that each of the mages gropes for greater and greater power and dominance. Some

Marauders believe they can find and control the things they take on as familiars and thus feel they must always have one around to add to their power. Other Marauders, however, know that beings who serve as familiars are so weak that they allow themselves to be used as pets, (and why let such a weakling into your innermost circle?) or they perceive the danger in embracing a creature with enough power to be a danger to others... and the Marauder. The Marauder blithely referring to a creature as his familiar or pet might discover at a particularly inopportune moment who's really in control of the relationship! Thus, some Marauders refuse to buy anything from the universal pet shop. After all there's no money-back guarantee in the Ascension War!



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Chapter Two: Society of Servants

*Here we belong. Fighting to survive.
In a world with the darkest powers.*
— Queen, “Princes of the Universe”



Like the mages with whom they interact, custos have lives, desires and goals of their own. Some may live with mages; others just work for them. Many are specifically recruited, while others fall into it through serendipitous (or awful) coincidence. Motivations range from a sense of duty to an admired colleague to finding out where the next big party is going to happen. Some are running from deadly enemies and seek safety in numbers (or magick). Others may provide

refuge and hiding to a hunted mage. Their emotions run the gamut from love to respect to disdain, depending on the individual custos and the mage in question. Some custos actually hate their mages and secretly work to undermine them.

All custos have dreams and preferences, a need for appreciation and a sense of personal worth, just like anyone else. Some hope to realize their greatest potential through their association with the mystick ones; some never know they're associating with mages at all. Then again, sometimes that's impossible to ignore...

Motivation



*He had famished in a wilderness,
Braved lions for my sake...*

— William Butler Yeats, "He Had Famished In A Wilderness"

Why do custos do what they do? They act from respect, admiration, love, hope for the future, self-aggrandizement, fear for a loved one's safety, camaraderie, desire for excitement, money, to learn magick from one who is already Awakened or for more complex and personal reasons. Regardless of motivation, all custos have a sense of duty. Many are willing to put their lives on the line to defend the mage, battling against foes who often overmatch them. Even employees who believe they are only protecting a mage's property or profits may fight to prevent theft and vandalism to that property. Every time they are called upon, each custos makes the decision anew to reenter the fray. Of course, some of them do make a whole lot of money.

Professionals

Custos can be just as greedy and self-serving as anyone else, and these folks charge high prices for their services. They stick their necks out for money or services, and those who are good enough at what they do are hired despite their lack of personal concern. Many mages even feel that hired guards and bodyguards are superior to those who serve out of friendship or love — they know the professional who fails won't be hired again! Pros have a vested interest in maintaining themselves at peak performance and doing their utmost to preserve the mage's life. It's hard to tell your big brother that you love him, but he shoots about as well as a chicken on acid. The same argument applies to those who handle business dealings for the mage. Aunt Emily's inexperience with tax laws could end up costing the mage far more than he'd have to pay a professional to keep his books for him.

Some professionals are not greedy, but simply feel that their expertise and knowledge ought to be acknowledged by those who wish to utilize them. That usually takes the form of payment. Their motivation is not greed, but pride. These custos will often go beyond the strict parameters of their contracts in order to prove their excellence. Some have gone so far as to give their lives. It is also not unusual for professionals to develop quite close friendships with those they serve. Many actually slip over into the "amateur" category through such friendships, yet continue to demand payment rather than admitting their fondness for the mage. Chantry servants, especially those whose families have served the Chantry for generations, may fall under either the professional or the amateur category.

Several categories of professional custos are listed below:

• **Accountants:** While this profession may seem terribly mundane to be included among the custos of a mage, accountants and business managers are among the key figures of many corporate or magickal empires. They keep the books, manage the transfer of money and resources for the business, and otherwise ensure the continued functioning of these commercial enterprises. Depending on the duration and nature of their service, these professionals may also act as key advisors to the mage.

While many of these professionals know nothing about magick or the Ascension War, they are in a unique position to oversee and understand the mage's operations. Therefore, they may become aware that there is much more going on in their employers' lives than first meets the eye. They may also prove to be valuable sources of information or tempting targets for the mage's enemies. These often-overlooked positions are also prime places for spies to attempt to infiltrate and observe an enemy mage's activities.

• **Bodyguards:** These custos are professional henchlings of the mage, used to protect him from physical or magickal threats. They rank as acolytes or consorts according to their level of ability. (Familiars may perform a similar bodyguarding function, but their relationship with the mage is far more complicated, and their "payment" takes different forms.) Conventional guards are usually humans with backgrounds as private security specialists, martial artists, law enforcement officers or military personnel. These custos (Sleeper or aware) may also serve as guards for a Chantry. The guards may not initially be aware of the true nature of the threat that they face, but those who survive for any length of time (and remain in the mage's employ) tend to learn quickly.

Certain mages also have Awakened beings serving on their security staffs. These are often hedge magicians and sometimes Kindred, Garou or spirits who work to provide the mage with protection from magickal and supernatural enemies in addition to more mundane threats. Though these beings may work for money, their motivations are usually far more complicated than mere financial gain. The mages understand this, and employer and employee will often watch each other very carefully even in the midst of a satisfying and successful professional relationship.

• **Computer Programmers:** In the modern era, even the most conservative Traditions are learning the importance of information management and computer technology. Computer programmers and other such experts are particularly important to the Progenitors, the



New World Order, Iteration X, the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts. In fact, these programmers, usually acolytes, often serve as both offensive weapons and as the first line of defense against Net-running enemies in the Ascension War. They create protective programs as well as viruses or information-gathering programs and, with the advent of virtual-reality technology (and the computer-related magick of their mages), often enter the computer Net themselves to do battle.

The Nephandi often hook up their programmers to their computers, so that the programmers are always monitoring one or more systems. Such acolytes also serve as convenient "hacker alarms," since the delicate pathways of their brains are much more sensitive than the computer nets which they guard. If a programmer goes into seizures, dies suddenly, or otherwise suffers a dramatic physical or psychological change, the Nephandus and her other custos are alerted to a potential bug or interloper in the system.

The Marauders are said to have a slightly different spin on this form of alarm system. Some Marauders seem to enjoy converting human assistants into living chaos programs. According to the few mages and aware hackers who have encountered such beings in the Digital Web, these programs seem to retain just enough of their humanity to know what they are, and more importantly, how much more they once were. These living programs seem drawn to other living creatures in the Web just as drowning men are drawn to their rescuers. Unfortunately, the only rescue for such beings seems to be death, and all too often they infect others with chaos viruses that will mean madness and death for any who stumble upon them. In this desperate and pathetic way, one that the Marauders presumably find entertaining, these pseudo-human "programs" protect their masters. (For more information on mages and the Net see the **Mage** supplement *Digital Web*.)

- **Personal Assistants:** These professionals serve much the same purpose for a mage as they do for a celebrity or business executive. They assist the mage in the mundane parts of her existence: keeping track of schedules and appointments, managing the affairs of the household, paying bills, and generally serving as the mage's liaison to the "real world." These custos must be among the most trusted servitors of any mage, for they have continual close contact with the mage and know nearly every detail of her life and her schedule. They generally occupy a position of prominence on the mage's staff, often speaking with her voice to the other employees.

Given the manner in which most mages, particularly the more powerful ones, are distracted from day-to-day reality by the contemplation of realities undreamed of by lesser beings, personal assistants are often vital. Personal assistants are not necessarily aware at first of the arcane life of a mage, but most who have been with a mage for any

length of time come to know at least part of the truth. Most personal assistants have a broad range of skills, from filing to the fast draw. After all, their employers' enemies may take "corporate raiding" to new heights!

• **Roadies:** This is only one of the many more unusual categories of professional hireling found in mage society. Roadies are common acolytes for any mage who travels as part of a band or a theater company (or a circus, for that matter). Members of the Cult of Ecstasy are by far the most likely mages to have roadies for custos.

• **Scientists:** Mages often sponsor and lead extensive research into the mundane and arcane mysteries of the world. Depending on their available resources (often quite extensive), many mages employ professional staffs of scientists, engineers and other academics to push back the unknown and expand the frontiers of human understanding. In fact, many mages believe the activities of such guided humans may be one of the most important means of moving the human race towards Ascension. Of course, mages invariably sponsor and encourage research that leads humanity toward their own personal spin on Ascension. Such research rarely takes place from a totally unbiased perspective. (Of course, what research is truly unbiased?)

These custos are most common, of course, among the Technocracy, but Virtual Adepts (particularly in the computer industry), some Sons of Ether, the Order of Hermes and members of other Traditions participate in these scientific ventures. Some speculate that Nephandi mages have also operated behind the scenes at certain

major corporations to engineer hazardous products, create ecological disasters, and otherwise spread misery and destruction across the planet.

Most scientists, though highly-trained professionals, are unaware acolytes. After all, the scientific paradigm in which they function best utterly rejects the multiple-paradigm reality of the mages. These scientists usually believe that they are engaged in standard research for private firms and may not even have an inkling of the true nature or purpose of the research. They may not know the mage, or he may appear to them as the elusive or eccentric senior scientist or president of the company (or even the weird janitor down the hall!). It is possible that a small core of scientists is aware of the true nature of the mage and the purpose of the research. These aware acolytes (rarely consors) almost always direct the activity of the firm or laboratory and may have more direct involvement in the Ascension War.

• **Servants:** These are the folks who keep the day-to-day grind from setting off too many sparks. They are the maids, butlers, cooks, mechanics, gardeners, launderers, etc. who move quietly in the background of the mage's everyday life, attending to the mundane matters necessary for survival. They range in loyalty from temporary or part-time help to those whose families have served the mage's family (or the mage) for generations. Many mages, particularly those with limited resources, will have few of these hirelings, if any. Masters of conservative Traditions or of the wealthy and powerful Technocracy may have extensive estates and multiple staffs to support them.



These servants are usually acolytes, but many know far more of the mage's activities than she would care to believe. A wise mage screens her servants very carefully, for those faceless blurs in the background of her life can be either indispensable aides or invaluable sources of information for her enemies.

Amateurs

Of necessity, the other side of the coin are those followers who neither expect nor receive pay for what they do. They choose to help the mage either from a sense of duty or from friendship or love. These custos may include bandmates, old friends, thrill-seekers, lovers and concerned family members. Some among them are professionals in the sense that they might be doctors, lawyers, teachers and such, but many are just normal people trying to make the world a better place. Those who have special abilities usually fall into this category, as they seek like-minded people with whom to associate.

Garou, vampires and Horizon beasties choose to associate with and aid mages for their own reasons. Garou usually help those who have similar goals, while vampires may seek knowledge, friends who accept them for what they are or powerful allies. Some serve as Guardians for mage Chantries in return for safe havens. Other Guardians may serve out of love or to honor an agreement.

A few common categories of Amateur custos are listed below:

- **Allies:** These custos are powerful beings in their own right. They associate with the mage and fight in the Ascension War out of some shared purpose or in pursuit of their own mysterious goals. These censors do not fight for pay and are not in the mage's employ, but will often expect hospitality and assistance from the mage. This will, of course, vary with the relative resources of the two!

Kindred, Garou, wraiths or Umbral spirits who ally with a mage will generally fall into this category. The enigmatic, free-roaming Gypsies act as allies rather than hirelings of the mage. While mages are by nature inclined to feel superior to those around them, the relationship between a mage and his allies is normally one of mutual respect (at least on the surface). However, trust takes much longer to develop than respect in these relationships. Allies all have their own purposes for associating with the mage, and allies may seek to use the mage just as the mage will undoubtedly seek to use them.

- **Friends/Lovers:** Friends, lovers or family members are especially good candidates for amateur custos. They associate with the mage out of love or friendship, and in most cases a mage can trust them implicitly. This type of trust is a rare and valuable commodity for a mage, and he can easily become addicted to its purity! If the mage is newly Awakened, these people may be remnants of the mage's former life. If the mage comes from a magickal family, these people may equally be friends and family members who have devoted their lives to service in the Ascension War, at least to the best of their ability.

While most of these friends are undoubtedly acolytes, some may be talented enough to classify as censors. If they are unaware of the truth about the mage or the nature and existence of magick, they may have to be told quickly. It is very difficult to keep a close associate in the dark about such a thing for long (which is one reason why mages have few close associates).

Friends and family are extremely valuable to the mages who so rarely experience such intimacy. However, these same friends and family members are an immediate and glaring weakness ripe for exploitation by a mage's enemies. Perhaps more than any other reason this is why so many mages isolate themselves emotionally as well as physically from other humans. More than a few mages have had those people most dear to them callously kidnapped, killed, or worse at the hands of one of their many enemies. Yet even mages find it difficult to live in an emotional vacuum.

- **Guardians:** Guardians are often amateur custos in the sense that they do not usually work for pay. Rather, these beings who guard Chantries normally do so out of a sense of honor or within the terms of some mutually beneficial agreement.

"Guardian" refers not to the mortal guards discussed in the section above, but to the spirits and/or supernatural creatures who often guard Chantries in exchange for Quintessence or other benefits (see *The Book of Chantries*). These may include Kindred, Garou, spirits or other magical creatures. Guardians generally are tied to a Chantry and do not venture away for any great length of time, even to aid members elsewhere.

- **Thrill-Seekers:** Some humans associate with mages simply for the sheer thrill of the experience, the constant sense of danger and excitement they experience from their contact with the Awakened. These sensation-jaded humans are almost always acolytes and usually guess or know only a part of the truth about the mage. It is possible that a number of thrill-seekers can just sense the power and potential of an Awakened Avatar. Although Sleepers, they are Sleepers who dream, and their dreams focus on the brightest lights—mages and other Awakened beings. (Some of the vampires' so-called blood dolls may also be dreamers; if this is true, their dreams are more likely nightmares.) Many of these poor dreaming souls are led to their own destruction by tantalizing quarter-truths and promises of more knowledge, more exciting experiences or greater power.

Nephandi and Marauders often take full advantage of thrill-seekers when they seek pawns or slaves for their cause. Many Tradition mages also take advantage of the zealousness of thrill-seekers. However, members of certain Traditions (e.g. Akashic Brotherhood, Order of Hermes, the Verbena) only find these people ("Grasshoppers," "wanna-bes," "pretty pagans," "goobs," "closet Merlins") incredibly annoying and avoid them at all costs.

Compelled

Not all custos are free-willed. The Nephandi are notorious for abusing their companions, treating many as little more than slaves. Even Tradition mages may compel spirits to guard their Chantries, binding them with agreements the creatures are not free to break. They cannot leave the area they are required to guard. The Technocracy are masters of intimidation and terror, and many custos are forced to serve them out of fear for themselves and their families. Some Conventions administer mind-altering drugs or fit their custos with cybernetic enhancements which deaden their humanity while turning them into perfect machines to serve the cause. Marauders may compel service from those caught up in their paradigms, whether accidentally or by design. All of these unfortunates are known as the Compelled.

As this would suggest, there are many types of compulsion, and many mages have and will compel service from their custos. It is all too easy, even for mages of the "noble" Traditions, to find rationales to force service from custos. Common styles of compulsion are discussed below.

Technocracy

While many servants of the Technocracy are true believers, even well-intentioned in their actions, the Technocracy makes frequent use of compulsion to attract and keep its custos. The Syndicate is the most likely to resort to the blackmail and physical compulsion of the "offer that you can't refuse" school, but the other Conventions (particularly the New World Order) also make use of their vast information networks to compile potentially damaging information about their employees (or potential recruits). Blackmail and implied threats to the family of the custos are common.

Regardless, it is common for the Technocracy custos to be drawn into the web slowly, unaware of who they work for or the purposes of what they do. Those who are not true believers, or who do not become so, may eventually discover unpleasant truths about their employer's activities. The truth most definitely does not set them free. For those custos who are aware, there is no retirement from the Technocracy.

Traditions

While the more brutal forms of compulsion are rare among the mages of the Traditions, they are not entirely unknown. Magick charms or manipulation, however, are more commonly used than brute force.

Many Tradition sorcerers see no harm in manipulating reality in this way. After all, they are masters of the art of manipulating and controlling the world around them. That desire to command reality usually extends to the people who inhabit it. This is particularly true of the Hermetic wizards, Euthanatos and Dreamspeakers, whose Traditions do not emphasize free will or the value of individual responsibility and individuality. The Akashic Brotherhood is perhaps the least likely to use compulsion on its custos, although shrewd psychology and peer pressure certainly have an effect on their behavior.



Marauders

The Marauders often compel their custos into service, at least at first, through magicks which sweep their minds up into the altered reality of the Marauder. The victim becomes a part of the world of the Marauder, unless she is strong enough to hold onto her own perception of reality and frustrate the Marauder's efforts (and this is rare indeed!). Although Marauders are certainly capable of violence when it suits their purpose (or their fancy), they normally avoid the harsh tactics of the Nephandi.

While initially this servitude is the result of magickal compulsion, the custos is almost inevitably integrated into the Marauder's reality and comes to accept that reality as truth. At that point, the acolyte or consor is serving voluntarily, though some would say that she has lost the ability to truly consent to anything.



A consenting adult
Technique in moderation
But vogue to the cult
Me, I've got my strangers
To exile in the night
— Melissa Etheridge, "Occasionally"

Trust is all-important when Tradition mages go "shopping" for companions; many recruit friends or other folks with whom they feel a sort of kinship or loyalty. Followers of similar religions or fashions, people with ethnic or cultural ties, or even those who owe the mage a debt are common choices. Other supernatural beings — werecreatures, vampires, even the occasional fae — are less common allies, but will sometimes join a mage in need. These beings, too, will have some sort of common ground for trust; Dreamspeakers typically ally with Garou, while the secretive ways of the Hermetic types appeal to the inquisitive Bastet.

The Technocracy makes regular recruitment efforts, sending agents to contact the candidates they have targeted. Some of these are compelled to join through threats or blackmail, but most join for other reasons: they are flattered to have been chosen, they like the money, they have freedom to experiment, or they truly believe they are performing a service to humanity.

Nephandi search for those who are ripe for corruption or make pacts for services from Umbrial beings.

Marauders take what comes.

That being said, several common recruiting methods come to mind. Of course, it is important to remember that there are as many ways to recruit custos as there are mages.

Nephandi

Many Nephandi resort to blackmail, brutal physical force or raw magickal power to compel their acolytes into service. As noted above, they treat all but their most powerful consors as little better than slaves, and the threat of horrible torture is as omnipresent as the penalty for failure. Even the most powerful, trusted and successful consor must always know what lies ahead should he fall out of favor with his masters.

The Nephandi also use more "subtle" magickal methods to compel their pawns into service. These methods often involve charms or illusions which alter the subject's perception of reality and shape it to suit the needs of the Fallen One. This gradual shaping process often has the side benefit of providing the Nephandus with hours of perverse entertainment as she watches her servant struggle to hold onto his own identity and exert some sort of control over himself and his situation.

Recruitment

The methods discussed below are but a cross-selection of possibilities. Although the groups most closely associated with each method of recruitment are mentioned below, remember that mages are always exceptions to the rule in everything they do. Undoubtedly there is a Dreamspeaker somewhere who routinely uses blackmail to get what he wants from his servants, while some Marauder sweetly persuades his custos to join forces with him. (Of course, this same persuasive Marauder may also enjoy snacking on randomly chosen appendages from his loyal servants, after their sweet introduction to Marauder life is completed!)

• **Blackmail:** A fairly common recruiting practice among the Technocracy, blackmail is sometime used by the Nephandi as well (often as a prelude to their efforts at corruption). The Conventions are particularly adept at gathering damaging information concerning those whom they wish to recruit. When combined with veiled threats of violence, blackmail usually produces the desired results.

The disadvantage of this technique is that it ensures only forced compliance and builds no loyalty among its victims. So long as the organization seems able to enforce its threats, most people will stay in line.

• **Corruption:** The Nephandi favor this method when bringing new servants or slaves into the fold. The Nephandus or her servants offer prospective recruits their hearts' darkest desires and appeal to the worst in their natures. Such dupes are then either so corrupt that they voluntarily serve that Dark Path mage or become irreversibly ensnared by the terms of mystic bargains. Many of these new custos soon realize their folly, but far too late to do them any good.

- **Employment:** Many mages, particularly those of the Traditions and the Technocracy, hire custos just as any business would hire prospective employees. This hiring process—complete with advertisements, applications and interviews—is typically used for positions requiring only Sleeper acolytes. However, it may also be used to fill more delicate or powerful positions. (Some Marauders run want ads as well, delighting in the absurdity of the process!)

Organizations and individual mages who hire their custos will of course go through a more rigorous background check than the standard employer and will usually magickally screen unsuspecting applicants. This reduces (though does not eliminate) the chance that an enemy spy will infiltrate the organization in that way. While a “hiring” process is much more rarely used to find aware acolytes and consors, similar methods may be employed. This “advertising” is most often done magickally or by word of mouth spread through appropriate channels, particularly through custos fellowships. This is a popular method for hiring consors for individual missions. Such consors may or may not become a more permanent part of the mage’s household afterward, depending upon the outcome of the mission (which is itself a form of screening exam).

- **Magickal Tracing:** This method of recruitment most often involves individual mages, cabals or Conventions casting magicks to locate and “tag” potential recruits. These magicks may operate by detecting the strength of the magickal potential or Avatar of the Sleeper or may simply be a form of prophecy that then becomes self-fulfilling. Some mages flippantly refer to this recruitment method as “big game hunting” or “doing a Marlon Perkins” (for all those Wild Kingdom buffs out there).

“Tagged” individuals are usually monitored for some time. The mages watch their growth (if they are children) and their behavior to determine whether or not they truly share the potential for power and the perspective required for the task in mind. Eventually, the mages send agents to interact with the prospective recruit, hopefully attracting his interest and attempting to bond as “kindred spirits.” Through a careful process of tests and training, the mages develop the potential recruit until he is prepared to join the organization. Although this method is time-consuming, it is usually successful in producing high-quality and loyal recruits. Unlike the products of more forceful methods of recruitment, these servants rarely “blow up,” going insane or otherwise collapsing under the combined pressures of magickal loyalty and the remnants of their own horror and repulsion.

- **Persuasion:** While all of these recruiting methods “persuade” an individual to work for a mage, this method comes closest to meeting the definition school kids find in their Webster’s. This technique consists simply of watching carefully for individuals who possess the necessary



qualifications for the job and who share the basic outlook of the organization. The mage, consor or acolyte contacts the prospective recruit, befriends her, and slowly introduces her to the idea and reality of magick and life as a custos.

The recruiters must be very cautious when using this technique because of the ever-present need for extraordinary secrecy and security. This may be, however, the most common method of recruitment used by the Technocracy and the Traditions. The Nephandi and Marauders use it less often — it is normally quite difficult to rationally "persuade" someone to be that twisted, and the process is pretty boring anyway. Some Marauders, however, do enjoy persuading some of the more "interesting" residents of insane asylums to join their cause.

• **Raids:** Nephandi and Marauders sometimes obtain new recruits (slaves) by the simple expedient of going out and grabbing a few likely prospects whenever necessary. These servants are nothing more than slaves, although many may later be brainwashed into enthusiastic service by magick or madness. These mages usually kidnap those unfortunates least likely to be missed, but are quite capable a stealing a child from the presence of her family or taking a prominent person if the mood strikes them. In these cases, the Dark Ones almost always go out of their way to implicate some person or group in the kidnapping, stirring up all sorts of amusing political and/or personal strife. Some mages even suspect that the kidnapping and subsequent "brainwashing" of Patty Hearst was actually a Marauder plot. If this is true, then it seems likely that another mage faction helped restore her to her family.

Mage-Custos Relations



O fret not after knowledge — I have none,
And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens
At though of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.
— John Keats, "What the Thrush Said"

The relationship between a mage and her custos may be as simple as that of an employer and employee. Yet, perhaps because of the nature of magick, the demands of the Ascension War and the power of mages to shape "reality," the relationship is often far more complicated and intense. Success often leads to great rewards, while failure may cost a custos far more than his job!

The risks that custos may take for their mages are far greater than those required of nearly any mundane. Yet there is something to the relationship, some component of the equation, which keeps them coming back for more. In part, the answer must lie in the benefits which they derive from the relationship or the disaster which would befall at its end.

Mages and their custos interact on three basic levels: the physical, the mental (intellectual and psychological) and the magickal. Therefore, the rewards and punishments which a mage can provide to a custos fall into these three categories as well. Remember, though, in most relationships, all three levels of interaction combine in unique and complex ways to form a powerful bond between mage and custos alike.

Rewards

I bring peace and understanding
I bring wit and wisdom fair
Precious gifts beyond compare.
We can build a world of wonder
I will make you all Aware
— Rush, "Cygnus XI, Book II: Hemispheres"

These are the goodies, the rewards and incentives which keep the tired, frightened, embattled or despairing custos going. These rewards also ensure the performance of the routine duties, the grind which occupies much of the time of the custos, just as with any worker. A wise mage ensures that her custos are amply rewarded for good service. Generous and fair treatment builds loyalty and motivates the custos to continue to perform at or above expectations.

Physical Rewards

The most common physical reward or incentive for service is simply payment, whether in currency or some other suitable mechanism of exchange. Naturally, this method is that which mages favor above all others for Sleeper acolytes. Of course, magick comes in handy when it comes to stretching the budget!

Professional acolytes and consors by definition receive some form of salary or payment, and even amateurs may accept room and board or special gifts from time to time. Familiars may demand certain items which attract their interest, but their primary rewards are magickal (particularly in the form of Quintessence).



The nature of these tangible rewards varies greatly depending on the proclivities and situation of the mage involved. For example, many Technocracy Conventions focus heavily on cash payments, but mages of Iteration X will often reward their chosen with biological or cybernetic physical enhancements. A Nephandus may reward a favored acolyte or consor with a slave of his own or perhaps brand the acolyte as a mark of honor.

These practices also vary greatly among the Nine Traditions. The Cult of Ecstasy provides notoriously extravagant rewards, while the Akashic Brotherhood expects its custos to live very simply. The Celestial Chorus believes in just recompense, but they also feel that virtue is its own reward! The Hollow Ones see little point in all of this (or pretend to), while the Sons of Ether often create astonishing technological gizmos to bestow upon their followers.

Mental Rewards

These rewards encompass the intellectual and psychological. Psychological rewards of service, from a generous, wise or kind mage, are similar to the benefits of serving healthy organizations everywhere, although the nature of service in the Ascension War may render the psychology and comradeship more akin to that of a military unit than a civilian business.

Feelings of belonging, recognition, validation and pride in the self and the organization are examples of the psychological rewards of loyal service. These can be particularly powerful given the ability of mages to subtly enhance emotions or manipulate the psyche through magick. Even the most miserable slaves of the Nephandi crave and receive certain types of psychological gratification during their service (although this often results from the psychological reversal of the slave identifying with the master). Marauders often reward their servants at bizarre, even utterly inappropriate times with kaleidoscopic fantasies that overwhelm the senses.

There are also intellectual rewards which a mage can offer to a custos. In a mundane sense, this may include cultural outings and instruction. This form of reward is particularly common in the case of an Awakened acolyte or consor who desires to be trained in the mystic arts or some other form of exotic instruction. While many mages may not have the time and patience to instruct a rank beginner, the bond between an acolyte and a mage is only strengthened by adding the dimension of instructor and student to the mix.

Magickal Rewards

It is this form of reward which sets the mage-custos relationship apart from the mundane. The ability of the mage to manipulate reality can gift a loyal follower in ways which exceed the limits of the imagination.

Mages can and do reward their custos with extraordinary things, bound only by the limits of Paradox. These rewards can take the form of magically-created gifts, property or cash. Familiars routinely receive magickal rewards in the form of Quintessence. Protective or offensive devices can be immensely valuable to the custos and enhance his utility to the mage. Iteration X and the Virtual Adepts are often the most "generous" in this regard, but Hermetic mages are well-known for their magick gifts as well.

Horizon Realms, and the ability to live in them, are often rewards in and of themselves. Many custos serve simply to live in another, better world. What mortal could resist the opportunity to visit (perhaps permanently) a custom-built reality where wonder is commonplace? The idealized Realms of the Dreamspeakers, Ecstasy Cultists and Verbena call to their acolytes' primal instincts and romantic fantasies. The gleaming corridors of Autochthonia, by contrast, are a technophile's wettest dream.

Another form of magickal reward stems from magickal charms and illusions. Magick can create, for the custos, an illusory world or sensory experience so powerful that the follower longs for more. These intense experiences, however, risk raising a psychological dependency not unlike that caused by certain drugs. Nephandi often use this craving to shackle their followers tighter. Some wise custos decline these gifts because they fear the loss of control and dislike being manipulated in this fashion.

Punishment

I'm goin' down to the whipping post

Down to the whipping post,

Oh God, I feel like I'm dyin'

— Allman Brothers, "Whipping Post"

This is the flip side of the coin, the iron fist inside the velvet gauntlet. As with any organization or relationship, service to a mage carries with it certain "disincentives" for poor performance. As with the rewards, the magickal abilities of the mage change and expand the nature and limits of the equation.

Physical Punishment

The most common form of physical punishment for failure is the demotion or dismissal of the custos. Because of the nature of the relationships involved, this punishment is used primarily for Sleeper acolytes. The dangers inherent in simply firing someone who is aware of the nature and abilities of the mage should be readily apparent (as witnessed by the damage rogue custos can do to their former masters). In extreme cases, (extreme, at least, among mages of the Traditions), the mage's need for secrecy may result in far more permanent "dismissal" for an ineffective custos.



The Nephandi, of course, use protracted physical torture extensively as a punishment for failure (and, perversely, as a reward as well!). Certain Marauder mages have been known to "zap" acolytes with painful bolts when in a fit of pique. Some are said to create brands on their acolytes' bodies that burn continuously for the period of punishment. The Syndicate may have relatives or friends of an erring custos beaten. The nature of the punishment varies with the organization, but it is seldom quickly forgotten, save by those who do not survive the more extreme forms of punishment.

Mental Punishment

This category of punishment consists primarily of the denial of the positive feelings mentioned above. Peer disapproval, shunning, guilt and shame all play a part in modifying the behavior of a custos (or any member of an organization, for that matter). This might also involve the denial or suspension of certain privileges or instruction.

Magickal Punishment

The mage can, of course, punish an erring follower magickally. The possible options for physical or mental mistreatment are limited only by Paradox (and decency). This tactic is rarely used by those mages who value their custos and their continued service because of the tremendous humiliation involved. Such punishment can also aim the mage down the path to his own doom as his ego begins to overpower his good sense. Inevitably, such mages become caught up in their own arrogance, and this arrogance almost always leads to disaster. A dangerous path indeed, and one to which all mages are particularly susceptible.

Rogues



*Love is clockworks
And cold steel
Fingers too numb to feel
Squeeze the handle
Blow out the candle
Love is blindness*
—U2, "Love is Blindness"

All good things must come to an end. This maxim applies to the relationship of the mage and custos as well. Sometimes the sudden end of the relationship is instigated by the custos rather than the mage. While this often leads to an honorable parting of the ways, many times it means that the custos has abandoned the mage and "gone rogue."

When a custos goes rogue, she might simply leave the mage and seek another life. She may also abandon her patron in the face of grave peril or betray him to an enemy.



Why might this happen? While it is impossible to adequately explore all motivations for abandonment, certain reasons are more common than others:

Rogue Familiars

The consequences of a poor relationship between a familiar and a mage, much less a familiar going rogue, has its own uniquely devastating consequences for the mage. When a familiar goes rogue, it can unleash all of the Paradox it has consumed for its mage back upon its former master—at once! If the mage and familiar have been together for any length of time, this sudden influx of Paradox can destroy the mage in one blast. Witches have fallen to dust, Sanctums have been obliterated, and wise men have disappeared forever after vicious fallings-out between mages and their familiars.

Sometimes, however, the familiar merely decides to leave the mage, using this Paradoxical lever to keep the mage from pursuing the relationship any farther. However, if the familiar is mad enough at the mage, or merely finds no other use for her, it may use this Paradox to blackmail the mage into getting the familiar what it wants. This potential for harm is the single greatest reason why more mages do not search out familiar companions. However, many mages still believe the benefits of such a relationship far outweigh the risks.

Acolytes and Consors

Although acolytes and consors cannot hold the threat of Paradox backlash against a mage, they too can do irreparable harm to a former master or to a current master who has grown too complacent in his “mastery” of lesser beings.

Betrayal

A custos may go rogue when she finds, or believes, that she has been betrayed by her mage. While such behavior might be expected of a Nephandus, betrayal is particularly devastating when it comes after a long term of service or from an unexpected source.

This is not a particularly uncommon occurrence; most acolytes and consors feel a tremendous amount of loyalty and connection to their mage. Their entire lives revolve around a single, powerful, awesome individual. The mage is invariably placed upon the proverbial pedestal, but even magick cannot always keep the mage from falling flat in the eyes of her custos. An acolyte or consor feels bound to her mage, and such bindings often lead to feelings of love and worship. However, such feelings can all too easily turn to loathing and hatred should the mage fail too often or too severely in her servants’ eyes.

While many mages are honorable and would never betray an associate, others are self-absorbed, distant and unconcerned with those around them. When a mage attempts to use his custos by placing him in an impossible situation, using him as bait, or simply sacrificing him to an enemy for personal gain, the survivor will naturally be outraged. In this case, feelings of rage, shock and betrayal and a desire for revenge will often cause that follower to go rogue.



Compulsion

On occasion, a custos may betray a mage and go rogue through some magickal compulsion placed upon her by an enemy. These magicks may take the form of mind control or may simply be suggestions or urges placed deep within the mind, set to activate when given the proper stress or stimuli (often at the worst possible time). The follower is not in control of her actions and may or may not be aware of them. The horror of a loyal custos watching herself betray or attack her mage is terrible indeed!

A certain school of thought holds that such an occurrence should be blamed on the mage in question at least as much as the enemy. A wise mage takes precautions against such occurrences through regular magickal examinations of those within her care.

Greed

Of course, certain custos may betray a mage for one of the oldest of all human motivations — greed. This occurs primarily among professional custos, with acolytes falling prey to this base urge more often than consors simply due to their different levels of experience, training and maturity. In the world of the Ascension War, supernatural or magic-wielding opponents can sometimes offer a servant even more than her heart desires.

Mistreatment

A custos who is mistreated, particularly habitually so, will often go rogue when given the opportunity to do so with any chance of success. This is most common among the Nephandi custos, for the mistreatment there is particularly brutal and habitual. Such behavior is fairly common in certain Conventions of the Technocracy (and the Sons of Ether) as well, but also occurs in individual cases in almost every faction, no matter how well-intentioned that group may be. While abuse may cow a servant for a long while, every being has its breaking point...

The consequences of betrayal, of a custos going rogue, are drastic indeed. A wise defector should attempt to do so at a time when her action will probably kill the mage and thus reduce the possibility of revenge. Mages as a group are not notoriously kind in any event, and this severing of the relationship is regarded as particularly unforgivable. Most mages who have been betrayed thusly by a custos will hunt her indefinitely for the sheer pleasure of taking revenge or at least to be rid of the danger she presents. This may even be true if the custos was compelled to betray the mage. After all, nobody said life was fair!



Omae u



Fellowships

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.

— William Shakespeare, Henry V

Custos have just as much (if not more) of a need for companionship as mages. While some groups of custos are thrown together by affiliation or job description, others have founded fellowships to provide themselves with emotional and intellectual outlets. Those who are aware of the true nature of their employment or association often form groups within which they can freely discuss their problems, tell anecdotes, share solutions and relax.

Groups can be large or small and take several forms. Some might be covens or activist groups while others might be bands or poetry-reading societies. As they are formed in response to the desires of their membership, custos fellowships could be anything. A few are fiercely protective of themselves and require stringent rules for membership. Many simply lump custos together by Tradition or level of association.

A few custos organizations are detailed here. These are by no means all of them or even the better known ones. Storytellers should work with their players to create their own groups in addition to those listed.



The Crossovers

This multi-Tradition custos organization encourages consors, familiars and reality-aware acolytes to go beyond Tradition associations and work to heal misunderstandings, schisms and antipathies among them. They welcome custos from the nine Traditions, Orphans and Ahl-i-Batin. The mages themselves are welcome should they wish to attend meetings, though some custos feel that they cannot speak as freely in front of their "masters" as they would like. The Crossovers share information that they learn about magick and mages in general and specific information about particular foes.

The Crossovers believe that the Ascension War can only be won when the Traditions and other "good" mages stop fighting among themselves over minor differences and philosophies and learn to work together in common cause — not just when necessary, but all the time. Many members of the Crossovers view their mage friends with bemused tolerance, but secretly feel that they should stop being so childish and get over themselves. In view of mages' tendencies toward hubris, the Crossovers might be right.

This group has no regular gatherings; meetings just happen whenever enough Crossovers get together in private (i.e. when no interfering or overcurious Sleepers

are around). They are loosely run in democratic fashion. When an emergency arises, they can contact one another through a facilitator, who usually works at or owns a place where they most commonly meet. Such places are usually restaurants, bars, coffee houses, motels or craft stores. There are several throughout the world, all of which have names which use the words Cross or Over — the Crossover, the Crosstown Saloon, Overby's Silver Shop, the Overlook Bar and Grill, or the Criss-Cross Craft Shoppe. Though their openness allows them to contact many custos from all over the world, it does render them more vulnerable to discovery and infiltration by the Technocracy.

The CorpseLight Connoisseurs

Unlike the Crossovers, who have a worldwide organization and cross Tradition boundaries, the CorpseLight Connoisseurs is composed of just six people. All are consors of Euthanatos mages and have begun to doubt their mystick companions' views. They are haunted by the suspicion that they have unwittingly assisted in murders rather than releasing spirits so that they may progress along the wheel of reincarnation. Because of this doubt, the Connoisseurs try to investigate death on their own. They use ouija boards and séances to contact wraiths and question them about the afterlife and reincarnation and engage in near-death experiences similar to those depicted in *Flatliners*. They occasionally use "volunteers" in their ongoing investigations. The Connoisseurs are led by a Native American psychic named Dark Water, who lives up to his name — cool, flowing and seemingly impenetrable.

SysOp Inc.

SysOp Inc. (also called "SysOpians," or "SysOphus" by the truly obscure) is a group of acolytes, consors and the occasional familiar of the Virtual Adepts (and a few Sons of Ether) who meet regularly in the shared reality of cyberspace.

Technomagickal gifts often allow favored companions to interact on a more immediate basis than most mortal Net users ever know. Thus, SysOp Inc. has their own heavily-warded network which spans the globe. There the members share information, company, understanding and the results of their experiments with cutting-edge software and technology.

The SysOpians spend most of their time on-line. Most have jobs in the computer industry or in related fields of information technology with a fair sprinkling of individuals still firmly ensconced in their aging parents' basements. They move freely about the Internet and all of the major on-line services and work together to attempt to carefully monitor the Technocracy. Many SysOpians actively hack into a variety of key areas in the Digital Web, keeping tabs on everyone from the government to the

Nephandi. In this respect, they perform a valuable service to the Council of Nine Traditions, for they combine an understanding of the technology and philosophy of the Technocracy with a far more cooperative spirit than can be found among most of their mages.

SysOp Inc. is, of course, vulnerable to penetration by Technocracy spies, particularly those from the Progenitors and Iteration X. They are very aware of this danger and rigorously screen potential candidates for membership. The SysOpians often monitor the on-line and off-line activities of new members for years before easing their scrutiny — if they ever do! Rumors abound that SysOp Inc. operatives sometimes spend a great deal of time and effort monitoring each other and/or attempting to hack into each other's computer set-ups. Cooperation is a wonderful thing, but no one can afford to be lax in the pursuit of scientific knowledge or one-up-manship!

The Children of Springtime

The Children of Springtime is an association of acolytes and consors who gather to celebrate life and Nature. They revel in the joy of reaching out to the world and to each other, and they use their "festivals" to rejuvenate their weary spirits, enabling them to return refreshed to the battle against the Technocracy.

Membership in the Children of Springtime is theoretically open to custos from all nine Traditions as well as Orphans. Most members follow the Dreamspeakers and Verbena, with a scattering of custos from the Akashic Brotherhood and the Cult of Ecstasy.

Custos and mages are always welcome at the festivals, which often coincide with concerts (particularly Grateful Dead, Indigo Girls and Crash Worship shows) or New Age or pagan celebrations. The Children use these events to mask their activities and see them as excellent recruiting opportunities besides. Many Sleepers who attend such concerts or celebrations have found themselves drawn into the society of the Children and from there into the service of one of the Traditions as their awareness grows.

While the Children of Springtime is primarily a social organization, its members will make every effort to come to one another's aid when needed. Their network spreads throughout North America and many other Western nations. Springtime members may be recognized by the forsythia flowers which they often wear, carry or incorporate in the design of their clothing, jewelry or gardens.

The Lab Rats

This group of Technocracy custos are all recipients of cybernetic enhancements courtesy of Iteration X. Each was once physically handicapped in some way. Some were thalidomide babies, while others were soldiers who lost limbs in warfare. A few others were accident victims who were left partially paralyzed. For all of them, the cybernetic replacement parts provided by Iteration X have

allowed them to become self-sufficient and active once again. Because they know they are serving as living experiments, they refer to themselves, with grim humor, as the Lab Rats.

Many of the Rats are active supporters of the Special Olympics and Paralympics and fundraising for the handicapped. Some serve as physical therapists. All are active recruiters for Iteration X because they believe quite strongly that every physically handicapped person can benefit from the wonderful new technology which has helped them so much.

Members of the Lab Rats are usually genuinely likable and concerned people. They care about those who suffer under the difficulties they themselves used to experience and fully support Iteration X's humanitarian efforts, helping others get into pilot programs like the ones which they experienced — programs which will fit the handicapped with cybernetic enhancements that will change their lives.

The Oscars

The Oscars are a group of Marauders who have sprung up around a mage named Oscar Fieldstone, a former Order of Hermes mage who always wanted to be a movie director. Now that he's insane, he can be one all the time — and his friends can come along with him for the fun! Aside from Oscar, who carries his prized director's chair with him wherever he goes, the group has a core membership of seven others. Actress was once Oscar's wife. She was a brilliant mathematician who was captured by the Technocracy and reprogrammed to serve as a mindless cipher for them. Oscar managed to rescue her with the aid of Persephone, the fanged, squirrel-tailed zebra, and Persephone's Umbral friends, the Mszxeg'llech (little pygmy fellows). Actress' mind was never the same after that, and Oscar retreated further and further from reality himself. Since he couldn't pronounce the names of the pygmies, he renamed them. They are now known collectively as "extras." Individually, they are named Props, Costumes, Lighting, Set Dressing and Effects. They play all the minor roles whenever the troupe goes "on location." Persephone acts as camera man. Actress plays all the leading roles. Oscar, of course, directs.

The Great Unwashed

Custos of the Hollow Ones make up a large portion of the Great Unwashed, along with a few Orphans and refugees from the Technocracy (Rumors persist that there are a few young Kindred in their ranks as well). This loose (what else?) organization gathers at and sponsors clubs, concerts, conventions, interactive theater events, poetry readings and other forums to promote their own dismal view of society, human nature and the human condition. They have taken their name both as a cynical jab at their image and as a statement of their protest against the world.





This organization has adherents in many cities and small towns and is particularly popular around university campuses. The events and clubs it sponsors promote a distinctly hip, "Goth-Punk" culture and work somewhat listlessly to influence modern society away from the psycho-spiritual domination of the Technocracy. It is rumored that acolytes of a certain clique of Hollow Ones, members of the Great Unwashed, have recently founded a small publishing house to spread their views to a wider audience.

Red Flag

Red Flag is the latest name of a group of cross-faction vigilante custos. Each has lost someone to the Ascension War, and all have decided to put an end to the conflict — through the elimination of mages. Members come from the Traditions, Technocracy and Marauders. Nephandi and their companions are not welcome and are regarded as prime targets. Red Flag feels that the common people of earth will only be safe once those with magickal abilities and supernatural powers are gone. They believe that, with mages, werewolves, vampires and other Awakened individuals destroyed, the mass of people can then shape the world to their beliefs and desires.

Almost all of Red Flag's members are censors or former censors, and most have mental abilities which allow them to hide themselves and their comrades from detection. Some are rogues who remain with their mages and act against them secretly, gathering information for

Red Flag, noting people, places, times and plans so that the group may know when to strike most effectively. They are led by a woman known only as Marta. It is rumored that Marta was the wife of a Euthanatos who tried to kill her, that she survived and began recruiting others to her cause to fight such arrogant behavior. Other rumors say that Marta has a vampire lover who is really the force behind Red Flag and who is using the group to rid himself of enemies and competitors. No one repeats these rumors to Red Flag members and lives.

The Typing Pool

This tightly-knit secret group of highly skilled office workers, mostly aware acolytes of Verbena, believe that the Ascension War can only be won through the placement of key personnel among the ranks of underlings in Technocracy Constructs. These censors note meeting times, personnel, supply requests and hundreds of other little details which help their mages assess what the Technocracy is up to or when they might strike next. At least one member of the Typing Pool is rumored to have become the personal secretary of one of the ruling triumvirate in one of the larger Technocracy strongholds. The Verbena have combined their talents to supply her with an untraceable, insidious drug which dulls the mind and makes the recipient more suggestible. She has been slipping it into her boss's morning coffee, so the story goes.

The members of this group have no powers; they can infiltrate the Technocracy simply because they seem so ordinary. In reality, each member is a superb actor and possesses great flair for undercover work. They are front-line spies who have agreed to have their true memories blocked off while they are at work to avoid unintentional betrayal. Mostly, however, they rely on the Technocracy's own arrogance to hide them. Non-Awakened non-essential workers are rarely subjected to any sort of intense scrutiny, as they are just part of "the Masses," and therefore not a threat.

Hex Pariah

This group loves heavy metal — the blacker, the better. More a gang or a cult than a fellowship, they dress in leather and chains, wear inverted crosses, pierce themselves in painful places, and raise literal hell at their favorite gigs. Many carry whips and knives, and rumor has it that winos and street people disappear when Hex Pariah goes on a "shopping trip." They use an abandoned warehouse, decorated in early Satanic, as a headquarters and are led by a young woman named Nun, who claims the title of "Devil's handmaiden."

Most of Hex Pariah's members are kids who just want to belong to something, who feel powerless at home and get a thrill out of dressing up and acting tough. The core group, however, are practicing Satanists who use the trappings and convenience of the group as a means of

recruiting new followers for the Nephandi. By feeding rebellion and anger with drugs, violence and deliberate sacrilege, these consorts help their masters drag the disaffected into a moral whirlpool while having a ball themselves. Herr Flax (see *The Book of Madness*), a potent Nephandus, is a patron of the group, but leaves the mundane chores to Nun.

The Tinkerers

Despite their carefree name, the Tinkerers are a serious and scholarly group of Technocracy companions. Their main focus is on sharing information on various cutting-edge technologies from cybernetics to artificial intelligences. Membership in the Tinkerers is quite exclusive. Though none are mages, all are extremely intelligent and innovative scientists and computer programmers.

The Tinkerers meet every three months. Coming together on the second weekend of the month, they hold seminars on various topics and hear the preliminary presentation of a paper or article written by one of the members, which will be submitted to one or another of the professional journals. Constructive criticisms are offered, and a question and answer session is held. Many of the Tinkerers have no idea that their Technocracy friends would be annoyed if they discovered that possible secrets were being leaked to the other factions. Others attend with their Construct's blessing, either to enhance their prestige or to steal those very secrets.

Survival Tactics

*For her own breakfast, she'll project a scheme,
Nor take her tea without a stratagem.*

— Edward Young, "Love of Fame."

The following treatise was prepared for the January 5th meeting of the now temporarily disbanded consor fellowship known as The Green Door.

Whether we are Sleepers or aware, acolytes or consors, whether we know it or not, all custos are playing a dangerous game — including those of us who think we know better. We are non-mages operating in a mage's world in the midst of a mage's war, and casualties can be high. Sometimes the mage you work for is at least as dangerous to you as the ones you don't. Although certain consors (particularly those with supernatural abilities) are far more capable than merely "aware" acolytes such as myself, we all are faced with the challenge to survive and thrive in a hostile world. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves living out the Hobbesian life: "nasty, brutish and short."

This does not mean that we should despair entirely. Far from it! There are ways that non-mage custos, such as yourself and yours truly, can stay alive in our mages' war of Ascension. I must make note, however, that my comments tonight do not necessarily apply to our mages' familiars. These creatures almost inevitably demand and receive sufficient attention and respect from their mage. While some mages refuse to acknowledge it, we know that the familiar usually manages to maintain at least an equal stance in the relationship — and any of you who have had to help your mage keep "kitty" entertained at three in the morning know that the upper hand does not always belong to the mage "master." Every mage will try to protect her familiar and keep it happy, while taking a potshot at an enemy's familiar. They are rarely as solicitous of their other custos.

The following information should help all custos, acolyte and consor alike, stay alive in this most dangerous profession. I would advise those of you with less tolerant masters and mistresses to keep some of these suggestions to yourself. Remember, you have only yourself to blame should you overestimate your mage's good will.

Knowledge is Power

The key to surviving as a custos is knowledge, either its complete lack or the equivalent of a Ph.D. in mage studies. If you have any knowledge, you need a lot of it. While those acolytes completely ignorant of all things magickal may be too insignificant to become targets, aware acolytes and consors run great risks. As all of you here tonight have already heard too much information for your own good, you had better start studying for those orals! It is vital for you, as a custos, to get as smart as you can as quickly as possible.

This means that any custos should learn her job and the do's and don'ts of that job in every particular. Angering your mage (particularly a Nephandus) can be the surest way to forced retirement! Every new employee should also seek a mentor, a senior person who knows the ropes and is willing to share her hard-earned knowledge. In this way, the young acolyte can learn as much as possible about the Ascension War, magick, the enemy, the supernatural, your employer and other mages. Whether this information involves knowing what weapons to pack for which kind of fight or knowing the rivalries between various factions, knowledge is as essential to your survival as the air you breathe.

Discretion is the Better Part of Valor

Silence is the best tactic for him who distrusts himself.

— Francois, Duke de La Rochefoucauld, "Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims."

While I have just told you that the first rule is to learn as much as possible, the second rule for a custos is to keep your mouth shut about it! A wise custos will avoid drawing attention to herself, other than favorable attention for doing her job well. Showing off your knowledge concerning the intimate details and particulars of every aspect of the Ascension War and your employer's activities is bound to cause trouble.

First, as a young custos who knows more than you should, you may attract unfavorable attention from your employer and his allies. Your mage may start to wonder how a youngling knows so much, and what secrets you know that you aren't telling! A mage is never more dangerous than when he fears a spy or a usurper. Remember: each and every one of us is a potential spy or usurper in the understandably paranoid eyes of our mages.

It is also wise for you to not appear overly ambitious, lest you be seen as a threat by the other members of your mage's cabal or household. It is far easier to survive as a small fish (which even the most powerful of us still is) in the Ascension War if you avoid drawing attention to yourself. A faceless acolyte is not perceived as any particular threat by the enemy and is therefore unlikely to be specifically targeted. A hotshot, however, is more likely to be disposed of just on general principles. Practicing discretion may allow you, as a custos, to survive long enough to gain the power and knowledge necessary to make a reputable stab at defending yourself.

High Performance

It is essential that any custos who wishes to survive be good at his job. It is an excellent survival technique to make oneself indispensable to the mage. Seek to do the job well, whatever it is, and always be ready to do more. A mage who loves her coffee is not going to kill the person who makes the finest cup (don't laugh! The ability to brew a good cup of coffee has saved my life on more than one occasion!), and good help of any kind is always hard to

find. Increase your knowledge, improve your skills, and seek more responsibility. Over time, your good performance and increased responsibility will make an impression, and a mage is more likely to run risks to protect employees she cares about.

By gradually increasing your abilities and responsibilities, and becoming more and more important to your mage or her organization, you learn the skills and earn the respect which is so necessary to your continued survival.

Manipulating Your Employer

Your mage's world is filled with intrigue and manipulation. It is a torte with layer upon layer of deception. Plots and counterplots, real goals and hidden goals, rivalries and intrigue are the ingredients of its icing. In this atmosphere, a completely open and honest person is at a great disadvantage and may not survive unless he is quite powerful. Most of us aren't all that powerful, at least not in relation to our mages, and therefore we must use a certain amount of guile to survive.

This caution applies to dealings with your employer as well as with outsiders. It is certain that the mage is using her custos for her own purposes; the wise custos should use the mage as well. Beware not to misinterpret this instruction! Your mage will probably expect that everyone, including her employees, are out for their own interests. She therefore is unlikely to take it amiss if you use flattery, exaggerations or your own particular skills and talents to get what you want.

However, do not lie to your mage (unless it is absolutely necessary for survival), and do not allow her to see you working against her interests. Plotting with the enemy or any other betrayal, real or imagined, is the fastest way to shorten your life span in the paranoid world of the mage. Therefore, a truly wise custos realizes the limits of effective manipulation and goes only so far and no farther. Knowing when to push and when to back off is an art form I suggest you learn with alacrity.

Manipulating Your Enemies

The enemies of the mage, and therefore of you, his custos, are many and varied. They range from other mages; to supernatural creatures such as vampires, werewolves, faeries and spirits; to other acolytes and consors; to threats unknowable and perhaps unimaginable. A key dilemma of every custos is how to survive as a "mere human" (or in any event, a less powerful being) when faced with this variety and depth of threat.

It is critical to remember that while many of these beings don't like you, they often don't like each other either! The rivalries between the vampires and the Garou, the mages and the faeries, and between the various factions of mages are legendary. Therefore, it is possible for a shrewd custos to manipulate these groups to keep their primary attention on each other and away from you. One common technique is to disguise your operations to ap-

pear to be those of another faction. While this may involve surrendering a bit of the "glory," it can greatly facilitate your survival. In the Ascension War, the most successful people are some of the least well known. Fame is a wonderful thing, but it's always nicer if you can live long enough to enjoy it.

It is also useful to remember that many of these groups will leap at the chance to foil the plans of another. Thus, if a vampire is plotting against you, the local werewolves may be more than happy to assist you in disposing of the threat (if you make it worth their while). If a particular mage is threatening you, he undoubtedly has enemies with whom you can consort to your advantage. Remember, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," at least for the moment. Try to keep on at least neutral terms with one or two of these factions at any given time, lest you find yourself surrounded by enemies and bereft of friends.

To successfully manipulate the rivalries between these groups, it is essential to keep your finger on the pulse of politics, both mundane and supernatural, of the area. Contacts are important, and you must see and be seen to keep up with the ebb and flow. While the mage may be divorced from such machinations, his custos should never be. Indeed, it is often the good work of the custos which enables the mage to maintain his aura of detached contemplation.

It is also possible to directly plot to manipulate two or more factions of enemies into costly conflict. This can be profitable, but must be approached with caution. If such plotting is discovered, the two enemies may well decide that it is worth their while to unite and eliminate you!

Strength in Numbers

A final key strategy for survival in the Ascension War is to seek strength in numbers. Custos are less powerful than mages or other supernatural beings, but numbers can often overwhelm individual power. We must band together and make sure that senior, more powerful custos train the younger ones well. Custos should know their enemy, understand his strengths and weaknesses, equip themselves properly, plan carefully, and always try to apply surprise, overwhelming numbers and firepower to the situation.

This philosophy also works well as a defense. Well-equipped, knowledgeable custos who congregate in numbers may present such formidable opposition that an enemy will depart to find an easier target.

In closing, I say good luck to all, whether you are mortal or fey, acolyte or consor. No matter who we serve, we share one thing in common: our mages. Good night and good luck.

—Jared Singhman, personal assistant to Mayra Llewellyn,
Order of Hermes.



Chapter Three: The Tale is Told

*I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair stand an end,
Like quills on the fretful porpentine.*
— William Shakespeare, Hamlet



The Storyteller plays a crucial role in any chronicle. She sets the tone of each story, orchestrates the actions of whole worlds of individuals, and monitors the ebb and flow of her chronicle. For a Storyteller used to tailoring stories for reality-busting mages, designing a chronicle for custos characters can be a bit tricky if she isn't careful. A story that is perfectly suited for a few seasoned mages would, in all likelihood, turn a group of custos into demon chow. After all, custos are different: they aren't mages, they're usually not Awakened, and they may not even know *anything* about mages, magick or the real world in all its Awakened wonder.

Custos are usually lower-powered characters trying to survive in a world of warring mages and other supernatural nasties, a world which many of these custos are still

struggling to comprehend. It is up to the Storyteller to play out the knowledge and wonder, slowly bringing the custos characters into the alternately murky or lucid world of the Awakened. Throwing too many mage-level obstacles at these characters can be as deadly to the chronicle as tossing a seal into a feeding frenzy of sharks. Remember, players tend to get bored really fast if their characters drop like flies or never have anything important to do.

This chapter is designed to help the Storyteller integrate custos characters into an existing chronicle, as player characters or as non-player characters, and design custos-based chronicles. Although not as overtly powerful as the mages whom they serve and befriend, custos are particularly resourceful and creative individuals. There is little doubt that custos have a unique perspective on the World of Darkness. They are each Alices adrift in Wonderland, and remember how many adventures Alice had!

Playing Custos



Judging by the virtues expected of a servant, does your Excellency know many masters who would be worthy valets?

—Pierre de Beaumarchais, *Le Barbier de Seville*

When the Storyteller decides to incorporate custos characters into a chronicle, whether it is already in progress or not yet begun, he must first decide what role these companions will play. There are two main ways to integrate custos characters into a Mage chronicle: the first is individual play, in which a player simply plays a custos as her primary character. In this type of game, the entire group may consist of custos or may be a mixed cabal of custos and mages. This is the most common approach, with each player taking the role of a single character throughout the chronicle or playing the “serial monogamy” game should her first character meet with an unfortunate demise (Of course, there’s always *Wraith...*). Custos are also particularly suited to use in the less common form of roleplaying known as troupe-style play.

Troupe-Style Play

Some players and Storytellers may want to have custos play an important role in the chronicle, while still keeping the main focus on their mage characters. The custos are around, but their role is subservient to—or at least different than—that of the mages. In troupe-style play, the players also use their mages’ acolytes, consorts or familiars as characters. For example, instead of just sending a group of agents out to infiltrate a lab suspected to be a Progenitor front and anxiously waiting for the results, the players can play out the mission as custos. For the duration of that scene (or story), the players play the custos risking their necks while their mages argue existential philosophy, turn common household chemicals into family pets, fly off to the farthest reaches of the Astral Umbra for a little R&R, etc.

Troupe-style play has many advantages. First, it can keep the players much more involved in the plot affecting their main characters—it offers them the chance to do more of the dirty work. It also gives the players a break from their primary mage characters while keeping the plot moving along. Portraying a custos can be a refreshing change and can also give a player a different perspective and sometimes new insight into the problems of the story. Finally, it can be very liberating to roleplay these relatively minor characters. Players can take risks when playing their secondary characters that they might not take with their main characters, even if those risks are necessary for the story or fit the character.

Playing a custos character in troupe-style play can also provide challenges and opportunities for roleplaying that the player wouldn’t have otherwise. The challenge may be just playing a far less powerful character in the

same world and same chronicle as the mage. It’s not always easy learning to talk your way out of a beating when you’re used to altering the fabric of reality just by wriggling your nose! For another challenge, players can also roleplay the custos of other mages (swapping loyalties and goals).

Some examples of possible groups of custos particularly suited for troupe-style play are given below. Of course, these troupes could just as easily work in an all-custos story or chronicle.

Custos Troupes

Mage Allies: A group of allies of a particular Chantry or cabal of mages may include vampires, Garou, familiars and spirits. This group is more powerful than most custos troupes and may be used for particularly dangerous missions or if the Storyteller knows she’s lined up an unusually deadly foe. This troupe offers the players the excitement of relatively powerful non-mage characters, as well as the opportunity to bring other genres and supernatural beasties into the chronicle. Playing such allies also provides a perfect opportunity for crossover chronicles with one or more of the other Storyteller games.

Chantry Guards: A group of Chantry guards also works well as a custos troupe. Mages must sometimes venture away from their precious sanctums, and their enemies know it. Chantry guards are all too often called upon to defend the Chantry against attack, ferret out infiltrators, or deal with more subtle and terrible foes... perhaps including one or more of those inside the Chantry.

Cabal of Familiars: A troupe of players can also take a break and play their mages’ familiars, letting players go places and do things that they would never otherwise do. Familiars don’t necessarily share their mages’ ideas on the nature of the familiar-mage bond. In fact, most familiars feel that they are the ones in charge of the relationship! Familiar characters can also often move through the Umbra, even traveling into the Deep Umbra to battle foul, twisted spirits and other nasties far more easily than most mages.

Friends: A group of un-Awakened (or at least “sleepy”) friends of newly Awakened mages can form a very close-knit group, learning together the perils of mages and magick. Most of these custos are even less aware than the budding mages of the true nature of the lives they will soon lead. Yet, their concern for their friends and lovers quickly ensnares them in the whirlwind of power, intrigue and betrayal that is life among the Awakened.

Servants to the Cabal: The most common custos used in troupe-style play may be the individual servants of the players’ primary mage characters. Normally composed of aware, relatively powerful companions, this highly-skilled group can handle quite dangerous missions and perform critical services for their mages. This group is ideally suited for keeping mage players involved in all aspects of a given story.



Individual Play

In individual play, the player decides to run a custos as her primary character. Custos can play many different roles in a Mage chronicle, as discussed in the section above and in Chapter Two. Some Storytellers may decide to run a "Right Hand" chronicle, with all players playing custos. There are advantages to these groups, since they are often easier to plan storylines for, and tailor danger levels to, than a mixed group containing both custos and mages. The Storyteller must remember to adjust the power of the stories and the enemies faced to the skills and abilities of the companions, using discretion and mercy when appropriate to keep events moving. No one wants to face the shocked horror of a group of players after the big, nasty Umbra spirit eats all of their characters twenty minutes into the evening's festivities.

It is possible that only a few players will want to play custos. This is rarely a problem, so long as the Storyteller is willing to create and run a mixed chronicle with enough opportunities for all the characters to strut their stuff. After all, cabals composed of one or two mages and their custos are not uncommon in the World of Darkness. They offer a diversity of background, experience and power that makes for excellent roleplaying.

Of course, with mixed chronicles there may be tension between players if (or when!) the mages in the group try to throw their weight around ("Polish my shoes, Mr. Acolyte, or I'll turn you into a toad!" "Oh, yeah? Polish *this!*"). This sort of "class conflict" provides a lot of interesting opportunities for roleplaying and character development. However, if the tension is between *players*, then the Storyteller might want to consider giving the acolyte something more exciting to do than searching for the mage character's missing socks.

So-called "buddy flicks" provide good examples of how to design a mixed chronicle. These movies usually feature two or more protagonists, one of whom is often substantially more skilled and/or experienced than the other (think of the Green Lantern & Kato, Sherlock Holmes & Dr. Watson, or any crusty detective-rookie cop combo). In these films, the talented "star" protagonist often does the bulk of the work, while his "buddy" always provides invaluable services throughout the film. These services range from simple comic relief to pulling the star's bacon out of the fire (often without the star character realizing just how much of his success is due to his buddy's efforts on his behalf). It is only by facing different enemies, overcoming dangers together, and gradually coming to understand each other that the characters realize how much they depend on each other for emotional and physical survival. So too do mage and custos often discover that they need each other to survive in a world filled with Sleepers and Awakened alike.

The most obvious difficulty in running mixed chronicles is keeping the danger and power level high enough to challenge the mages while allowing the non-mage characters a fair chance to survive. The Storyteller may want to give the custos characters some sort of special protection, knowledge, additional powers or defensive magic to enable them to survive in higher-octane mixed chronicles.



Jim was most ruined for a servant, because he got stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches.

—Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

The kindest term most people would use for the life of an aware custos is *bizarre*. Unaware companions don't know any better, and familiars don't expect things to be any other way. However, most custos are caught in between these two extremes. They have just enough information to know that the world is chock-full of big bad wolves, vampires and bug-eyed monsters, and that they'll probably get the short end of the stick in any confrontation. Custos had better have more prepared than a juicy stake and the garlic in their kitchen if they want to hang around for long!

Many custos feel that their mages' ability to manipulate reality skews their perceptions away from the workings of the world in which most people live. It is all too easy for a mage to become wrapped up in magickal concerns, temporarily

Certain Traditions are far more likely than others to foster these mixed cabals. Hollow Ones, Cultists of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers and the Sons of Ether are prime candidates for these groups. It is particularly common in these Traditions for a group of neophytes and followers to arise around a more powerful and experienced mentor.

The Setting

losing the inclination to tend to more mundane concerns. This constant shifting between reality paradigms is a major reason why mages retain custos in the first place. Familiars serve the opposite purpose — they are continually aware of and concerned with their mages' magickal realities. Someone more grounded in the mundane world needs to make sure that the mage showers occasionally and that the power bill gets paid so that the experiment in the freezer doesn't climb out and wander around looking for a snack.

As a result, a custos is constantly pulled to and fro between the mundane world and the magickal. She experiences the disconcerting juxtaposition of the two worlds and comes to realize even better than a mage that nothing is as it seems (Mages, after all, tend to see and concentrate on the mystick behind the mundane, sometimes to the exclusion of all else). A custos must be constantly on guard against the dangers of both worlds — a stressful, if rarely boring, existence. She can literally be washing her socks one minute and fighting the Technocracy the next.



Through The Looking Glass

Curiouser and curiouser!

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

What would Wonderland be without Alice? Through Alice's eyes, Wonderland comes alive, replete with confusion, horror, excitement, beauty and wonder. To the inhabitants of Lewis Carroll's bizarre world, Wonderland is the norm — it is all they have ever known. The inhabitants of Wonderland accept and expect the Red Queen to scream, "Off with his head!" and for the Cheshire Cat to disappear, leaving only his wide grin floating in the air. It is only Alice's eyes that can look afresh upon Wonderland and remark upon its wonders... and its horrors. In the World of Darkness, it is the custos who take the role of Alice, stepping through the dark mirror of mundane reality to enter a world filled with magick.

One of the most interesting aspects of a custos-oriented chronicle is the opportunity to gaze afresh on the wonder of magick, to "step through the looking glass." It is up to the Storyteller to help convey this sense of a new world to his players and their characters. Perhaps the easiest way to create this sense of newness and curiosity is to introduce players who have never played *Mage: The Ascension* to the game by using un-Awakened custos for characters. As stories unfold and the magickal nature of the world is revealed, characters and players alike can easily appreciate the wonder of the Awakened world. (Custos characters can also be easier for new roleplayers to play, as their abilities are more easily defined and used than those of True Mages.)

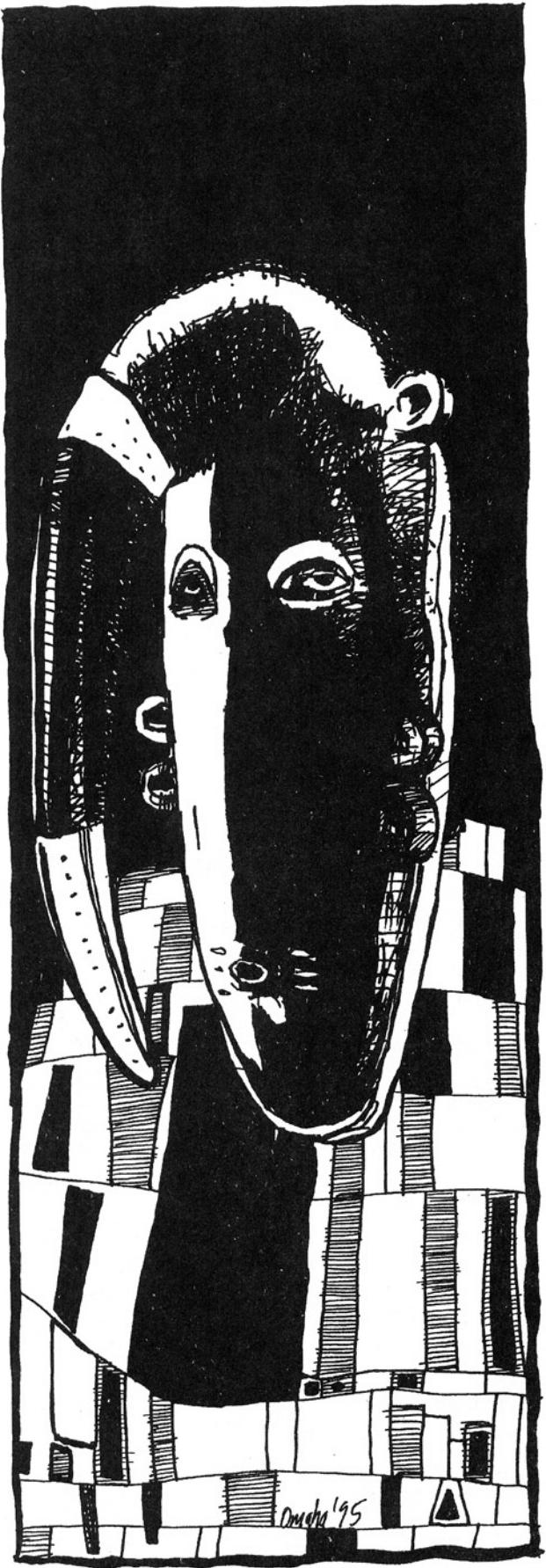
But what about those players who already know all about the World of Darkness and the Awakened beings that exist within it? Here the Storyteller may have to stretch a bit to reawaken the sense of naiveté and mystery the players' new custos should feel when faced with their weird new world. One of the most effective ways to immediately put more experienced players back into Alice's patent leather shoes is to describe everything magickal. Don't just casually inform the players their characters see, say, a small demon attempting to trail them. Instead, describe slightly different scenarios to each character. Perhaps one character notices the reflection of a tiny, wizened form, red as an apple, staring intently at her in a shop window. Another character might notice the smell of burned fruit over and over again. Yet another character glimpses small hands shoving an antique vase off its shelf in a store the group has just entered. The players can work to figure out what this awful little thing is that seems to be following them... or maybe they all just need more sleep. Describing all things and effects magickal creates mood and interest far more effectively than saying "it looks like its one of those creatures from page 82."

Another technique that Lewis Carroll uses brilliantly in *Through the Looking Glass* is the manipulation of language to create the sense of an alien world. In several of his poems, such as "Jabberwocky," Carroll uses bizarre words and phrases to convey the otherworldly creatures and actions taking place. "And as in uffish thought he stood/The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,/ Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,/ And burbled as it came!" Of course, not every Storyteller has to be Lewis Carroll to use this technique. Using a few unusual words in key places — even "nonsense" words — can help players think about the world in unusual ways.

Storytellers should also remember that the world the custos have newly entered brims with complex relationships, age-old enmities and ancient, ongoing quests. There is absolutely no way that the young custos can know more than a few vague pieces of information about the social dynamics of mages and other magickal creatures. However, experienced *Mage* players almost assuredly believe that they understand much of the dynamics of the World of Darkness, even if their characters do not. The Storyteller can use this sort of confident belief to completely unsettle her players simply by switching around a few of the major allies/enemies groupings. Having the new companions stumble into the midst of a situation — or forcing a situation on them — in which they receive only tantalizing pieces of information about the forces surrounding them and what they really want is also quite effective. (Men in Black are often useful for this kind of work.) Storylines based on the theme of loyalty or subterfuge (see below) also work well to foster uncertainty and mystery in a chronicle.

What's Familiar to a Familiar?

Unlike other custos, who generally regard the mundane mortal world as the norm, familiars are quite accustomed to magickal reality. Thus, while other mage companions "ooh" and "ahh" upon entering the High Umbra, the familiars may just be coming back home. To most familiars, it is the human un-Awakened world that often seems bizarre, nonsensical and even horrific. Perhaps the familiar finds mechanical devices incomprehensible or thinks that human social dynamics are ridiculous and in need of correction. For the familiars, this world is Wonderland, and they are our Alices. The Storyteller should try to work with any player running a familiar to come up with ways in which the human world seems bizarre to the character. The perceptions of a mixed group of familiars and acolytes often feed off each other, as what familiars find fascinating is often commonplace to consorts (and vice versa).



Omaha '95

The life of a companion is always strange and very often surreal. Custos deal with the unique stresses in their lives in any number of ways. Many develop a sort of cynical good humor, a "nothing-can-singre-me" attitude that uses wisecracks to shield them from the shock and pain. Others, especially those who devote all their time to the service of a mage and live in an Awakened environment, take in all the strangeness with complete equanimity. They expect nothing else from their service. Some crack under the strain and go spectacularly rogue.

Idiosyncrasies abound among the custos. They reflect, and reflect upon, their mages' world in ways utterly impossible for someone personally swept up in magick. It is perhaps this sense of perspective that is the custos' most important contribution to the World of Darkness. It is this same unique perspective that can make custos characters so enjoyable to run in a chronicle.

Stories

*Well, honor is the subject of my story,
I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.*

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

There are many kinds of custos stories, running the gamut from horror to romance and from intrigue to action. Yet there are a few elements and themes that custos stories and chronicles are easiest to shape around. If the Storyteller knows the theme (or themes) she wants to convey through her story, it becomes far easier to determine the motivations and actions of the non-player characters and groups with which the custos interact.

Successful chronicles most often are those in which the Storyteller weaves together two or more central themes that are interesting and evocative for the players and their characters. It is also important for the Storyteller to ask herself a few questions about the player characters who will take center stage in the drama. For example, why are the characters custos? Are they motivated by love? Money? Revenge? Curiosity? What is important to these characters? Honor? Service to one's mage? The search for knowledge? Punishing themselves for some failure? The information given in Chapter Two on motivation and recruitment provides a number of good examples to draw from. The answers to these questions usually lead to the form the theme of the story should take. The sections on common punishments and rewards meted out by mages can also provide fodder for these stories.

Remember, the characters are far more likely to become involved in the action if the themes in the story resonate with their motivations and concerns. It is also important to keep in mind that no matter how powerful the consor, or how wise the acolyte, they are never a match for the sheer raw power of most of the beings they encounter. Likewise, custos are generally new players stepping into a game almost as ancient as time itself. It is bound to take the characters quite a while to figure out what game they're playing, let alone the rules! Of course, just when they think they have it all figured out, it's time to change the game...

The following themes and story suggestions provide examples of how the Storyteller can craft storylines which work well for most custos characters. The Storyteller should feel free to expand on these themes to create the stories that work best for her particular troupe.

Loyalty

Almost all custos chronicles revolve to some extent around the themes of loyalty and trust. Loyalty is a constant issue between mages and custos, and one that is tested in many ways. Where does loyalty end, if anywhere? At what point does loyalty sour? Mages need to be able to rely on the loyalty of their companions, while the custos must also rely on their mage. After all, mages teach them about a world that a short time ago may have been beyond their wildest imaginings.

Trust is often an even more delicate issue among wizards and their custos. Often, all parties involved in a story must give trust (or withhold it) equally or face the sudden collapse of their efforts. In many respects, the custos-mage bond is a marriage, with all the strengths and vulnerabilities that such a relationship implies.

Loyalty Stories

- A war for control erupts among the various cabals in the Chantry. If the players are custos serving the Chantry, they must of course stand with their mage in the swirl of battle and intrigue. Yet the players may believe that their mages are acting out of foolish pride, endangering the Chantry and possibly their own best interests. Where lies honor? What is the price of loyalty?

- The characters discover a spy in the Chantry (or in their cabal). This traitor, who had masqueraded as a companion, is actually a mage of great power who has been spying on the characters and now wishes to use them in his diabolical schemes. As a fail-safe measure, the traitor has ordered his minions to slay loved ones of the characters should they fail to report to the captors at regular intervals.



Do the players betray their mage and their Chantry to save innocent lives? Is their loyalty to the Chantry more important? Is there another way out?

Intrigue

Intrigue abounds among the Awakened. The custos who share their lives inevitably get swept up in one or more of the varied plots and counterplots that are always hatching among the myriad factions of mages and their supernatural friends and foes. Their position ensures that custos are likely to imagine intrigue and subterfuge even where there may not be any. They are not full-fledged members of mage society and often must gain their information from overheard snippets of conversation, back-stairs gossip and hasty summaries. A single odd remark or a strange doll found on the doorstep one morning can send custos scurrying as they attempt to discover who has turned their attention on them and why. It is easy to jump to conclusions in this complex and deadly world.

Intrigue Stories

- The Masters and Mentors of the Chantry are closeted in an arcane ritual of terrible importance when the Chantry is attacked. The companions must stretch their skills to the utmost to defeat the enemy, save the Chantry, and prevent the interruption of the ritual.

Yet in the aftermath of the battle, the characters discover clear evidence of the unthinkable — the Technomancers and Nephandi joined forces in the as-

sault! The characters must discover the cause of this mysterious alliance, unearth the source of the link, and root it out before the dark tide overwhelms them all. (In a troupe-style story, the mages might take over the investigation, giving their poor Chantry guards a much-deserved respite!)

- The custos characters are sent on a mission of grave import to the Nine Traditions to recover an artifact from the hands of Infernal minions on another continent. The diabolist in question has devised a means to detect any Awakened being which approaches his stronghold; therefore, these companions will be more effective at recovering the object. They are instructed to return the artifact to one particular mage, high in the ranks of the Tradition followed by a majority of the player characters. This mage is to secure the artifact and safeguard it against all non-Tradition forces.

As the mission unfolds, the characters begin to uncover disturbing evidence that all is not as it seems. They find themselves wooed by agents of the Technocracy, the Nephandi and even elements within the Nine Traditions who are competing with them to retrieve the artifact. In fact, the group is approached by a mage of a competing Tradition, preferably one to which at least one character feels some loyalty. This mage tells the characters that the first one is lying to them, seeking to use the artifact for his own selfish gain. While it is clear that the characters have not been told the full truth, who do they believe?



The characters recover the mysterious artifact from the cultists with relative ease, but then have to run a gauntlet of competing groups to get it back home. If the characters choose not to take it to their employer, where do they go? Why is this object so danged important? What are their employer's true objectives?

• This story is designed for a group which contains at least one supernatural ally, such as a vampire or werewolf. The local vampire prince, or the elder of the local sept of Garou, declares war against the local mages. The characters are caught in between, with at least some of their members torn by conflicting loyalties.

The characters must negotiate their way through the dark intrigues of the city (or the culture of honor, respect and vengeance of the Garou). They must discover the causes of the conflict and attempt to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. It is up to the characters to avert the conflict and the massive bloodshed it will engender, which would severely weaken both cultures and likely result in the deaths of more than one of the characters' allies and associates.

Horror

Horror is a visceral, gut-wrenching theme which takes more than throwing a few slavering creatures at the characters to cause. In fact, it is most often the time between when the characters know (or believe) that there are slavering beasties coming after them and when the monsters actually put in their appearance that horror occurs. In the movie *Alien*, one of the main characters slips into the ductwork to find the nasty critter waiting down there in the dark. Unfortunately, the crew member monitoring the alien's position in the maze loses the alien, and the man is left alone in the dark with it. When the alien actually munches him, it releases the audience from their horror. Why is it a torturer rarely hurries in his work? Because his victims feel the most horror while watching him heat the brand or sharpen the knife. They know what is to come, and their imaginations create whole worlds of torture before the brand ever touches their skin. Storytellers who remember that this time between knowledge and confrontation is often the most horrific can create horror and tension fairly easily in their stories.

Discovering a *fait accompli* or that the character has arrived just a little too late to help can also cause horror. Here it is the horror of failure, of loss, that confronts the custos. This theme usually works best if it is brought in at the beginning or middle of a story, because the character will want to find a way to make up for, or fix, the result of her failure. Storytellers who leave a character feeling like a failure at the end of too many stories, however, will undoubtedly soon surpass even the most dedicated player's angst tolerance.

Horror Stories

• A player character, custos or mage, is captured by the Nephandi. The foul mages wish to enslave her and warp her mind to their cause. The other characters must track the kidnappers, either magically or physically, through the Nephandi's nightmare world of noise, pain and chaos. They must then decide whether it is worth the considerable risk to attempt to rescue their companion. Do they dare risk trying to infiltrate the evil web?

Even if the rescue is completed, the character may have already been driven insane by the hideous evil of the Nephandi and the torment she endured. Only by traveling deep into the dreaming representations of her crazed mind can the characters slay their friend's internal demons and truly bring her home at last.

Stories involving insanity and torture require caution, but can provide great drama. Properly handled, they can allow the characters to explore the depths of horror, pain and evil which the Nephandi symbolize.

• The custos are battling a revolting Nephandi familiar when the creature steps through a magickal portal to escape. Unfortunately for the custos, the creature also draws them through the portal in its magickal "backwash." They find themselves in a shifting nightmare Realm somewhere in the High Umbra. The characters must find a way to return to their world as swiftly as possible, for their chances of survival in this alien Realm are slim at best.

Romance

Love and passion are at least as important to mages and their companions as to the Sleepers curled up in the safety of their beds, comfortably ignorant of the true nature of reality. In fact, the topsy-turvy world of the Awakened may make a stable, loving relationship even more important to those within it. Glimpsing the true multiplicity of reality is enough to make a character feel lonelier than ever among that great, vast incomprehensiveness.

Love, whether the love of a parent for a child or a lover for his partner, is a powerful force. People will do almost anything to keep the object of their love alive and safe. When a custos loves, however, that love unfortunately creates a vulnerability that far too many people can use to manipulate or exploit him. Custos can also serve as pawns in that game, used to manipulate a mage who dares let down her defenses long enough to learn to love a devoted companion. This combination of danger, elation and love in the World of Darkness makes romantic connections a particularly useful theme to keep characters interested in a storyline.

Romance Stories

• In this story involving an unaware custos, romance blooms in the most unlikely of places! An august mage is smitten at the sight of a young person (one of the characters) whom she sees in passing on the street. The mage's pursuit of the character rivals the great Cyrano de Bergerac, but how does a mage bring a young mortal into her life without revealing the secrets of the Ascension War?

This story, suitable for beginning custos characters, revolves around the growing awareness of this young lover and her friends and tracks their shock and wonder at the new existence that opens up before their eyes.

A twist on this story, or a more abrupt introduction to reality, has the love interest kidnapped by the mage's enemies. The kidnapping and subsequent rescue by the mage and the other characters may affect their relationship adversely or provide a more interesting courtship than just sending roses!

• A loyal custos (preferably one who has a long history of loneliness and heartbreak) finds the love of his life in a beautiful, intelligent and happy soul who seems the answer to any man's prayers. Neither realizes at first that the other is magickally aware, but both eventually learn the truth. They are tragically divided by their loyalties, for the lover is a rival consor. As the two struggle with this revelation, fate steps in.

Both are ordered by their masters on missions that they know might bring them into direct conflict, even combat. The custos must choose between love and loyalty. Meanwhile, the character's friends watch his growing anguish. They also await their friend's decision, for they will have their own choice to make if their companion chooses to follow his heart. (This story also has a strong loyalty theme.)

Rescue

The theme of rescue is an age-old one. Rescuing someone or something is always at the heart of quests (or else they wouldn't be quests) and often crucial to adventure yarns of all kinds. In coming to the rescue, characters prove their worth to themselves and to others. Stories with this theme also often bring to light the importance of relationships and people's connections to each other. There are not many better ways to form a bond with another person than by rescuing him, being rescued by him, or rescuing someone else with him. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that romance often flourishes in adventure tales, blooming in the harsh atmosphere of gunfights and brawls. Combining these two themes in one story is one of the easier ways to get players quickly involved in a game (see the first example story under Romance for an example of this combination of themes).



Rescue Stories

- The custos, in all the brashness of inexperienced youth, are lured into a trap by agents of the New World Order. Captured and facing torture and brainwashing by their enemies, they wait and suffer in the face of certain doom. In fact, they are merely bait to trap their mages.

Predictably enough, the concerned and affronted mages venture a rescue attempt, only to find themselves surprised, ambushed, and captured in the course of freeing their servants! The minions of the New World Order, veritably cackling with glee at their success, make only a half-hearted attempt to recapture the insignificant custos. After all, they now have the true prizes! The companions must now regroup, rearm, band together, and mount their own rescue attempt against forces powerful enough to keep their mages imprisoned. They had also better hurry if they hope to have anything left worth rescuing! (This storyline is ideal for troupe-style play. Here, the players can begin by playing their mages, then turn to their custos characters, then back to their mages, etc.)

- Someone the companions value—a lover, a friend, a pet, an innocent bystander, etc.—is endangered by some mundane but nonetheless dangerous crisis. Perhaps a dishonest landlord has kicked her out in the street, the cops have arrested her for some crime, or a local gang has singled her out for robbery or assault. Concerned custos will have to be careful when confronting a situation where force or magick might be a liability. Clever detective work, subtle intimidation or behind-the-scenes manipulation might be more effective (and less dangerous) than head-on confrontation.

This kind of story makes a nice change of pace after a long series of mystick adventures and might offer some comic relief in an otherwise grim chronicle. Imagine what fun a custos group could have harassing a slumlord, sabotaging a corporate takeover, or humiliating an obnoxious politician! Who needs the Nephandi when you've got Newt Gingrich? These kinds of rescue stories should be cleverly set up and run with an eye towards the mundane rather than the mysterious.



ELLIOTT 95

Chapter Four: Bones Clothed in Flesh

First you go speaking to the shrubbery, and now you've taken to naming it, as well. Faith, Doc, and you're a different sort o' man entirely.

— Simon Hawke, *The Inadequate Adept*

Character Creation



What's it like to play a companion, striding (sometimes blindly) alongside your mage into a world he and his kind take for granted? What are you like? What kind of abilities will you bring to the journey? What if you yourself are the guide? Although they resemble the mages they follow in many ways, custos have aptitudes unique to their own natures, dealt with in this chapter.

First of all, you must decide just who you will play. The best place to start is to decide what the character did before becoming involved with mages. Was she a student

or an older person with a career? Did he believe in magick or think the whole thing was lunacy? In this particular instance, you may have the option of being wildly creative in your character creation, for some custos are Horizon Realm creatures, mythic beasts, cyborgs, possibly even animate shrubs. Players should work with the Storyteller to determine what type of custos will most enhance the intended chronicle without unbalancing the game. Aside from the need to avoid destroying the story with maxed-out, overpowered characters, your imagination is the only limit to what you may create.

It bears repeating that despite the rather mechanical nature of this chapter, Mage characters are more than a collection of point-costs and Advantages. Players should build custos characters with an eye towards interesting stories and dramatic possibilities, not lists of neat powers. Storytellers should ignore point-costs for their non-player characters — these systems are unimportant except as game balancing tools. A custos is more than the sum of her points!

Once you know what the character used to do (and possibly still does), you must determine when and how the character came to associate with mages. The Storyteller may have some ideas which will tie into her chronicle, or the player may suggest ideas which the Storyteller may be able to work in. Before getting too involved in this part, however, the player should know whether she will be playing an acolyte, consor or familiar. Acolytes tend to know little of what is really going on and so would have a slightly different introduction to the mage than a consor or familiar. This part can also shed some light on the character's motivation for being with the mystick ones. Is there a love interest? Perhaps a rival faction is attempting to kidnap the character, and he finds safety with a mage.

If you plan to play an Awakened being such as a Garou or vampire, you will need to rationalize your association with mages. Perhaps you are a family member who has become a vampire and now seeks to reopen communications with a beloved brother. Perhaps the mage is a Garou Kinfolk and considered good breeding stock.

Natures and **Demeanors** are optional, but are recommended as excellent tools for roleplaying characters who are slightly or radically different from yourself. Playing within the constraints of the character's Nature and Demeanor can be a satisfying challenge and may give you greater insight into her personality, behavior and motivations.

Your **residence** is your home base. It may be where you live and keep up a mundane lifestyle when not with mages or it may be a Chantry. You may wish to have more than one residence. One could serve as a front, another might be a hideaway, while a third could be in your mage friends' Horizon Realm.

Affiliation is the faction to which you belong. You must choose (with Storyteller approval, of course) whether you will be affiliated with Tradition mages, Orphans, the Technocracy or even the Marauders. Though Nephandi-affiliated characters are not recommended in a normal chronicle, these might be possible in a chronicle which features themes of corruption.

Type refers to the sort of custos you are. You are one of three types: acolyte, consor or familiar. Acolytes have no Special Advantages and are generally not as powerful as consors or familiars, some of whom have Special Advantages unavailable to acolytes. These stronger companions are usually aware of the Ascension War and their part in it.

Concept is a one or two word description which sums up your character. Examples of concepts include Horizon beast, music teacher, talking cat, scheming vampire, hotel maid, rock guitarist, environmental researcher, computer programmer and gonzo journalist.

Once you've reached this point, you can start filling in dots. As with most Storyteller system characters, you must prioritize your Attributes as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary and assign points to them. Keep your concept in mind when doing this, and choose the attributes that make the most sense for your character. Alternatively, you might play against type, choosing, for instance, to play a bodyguard with low Strength and Stamina, while maximizing your Wits in order to gain the first move in combat situations. Poor Dexterity might be compensated for by increasing Brawl or Firearms.

Next you should prioritize and assign points to your Abilities. Again, you should choose Abilities that will allow you to function in the role you've chosen (unless you wish to play an inept, bumbling character who drags the rest of the troupe into whatever misadventure his ineffectiveness generates). Starting characters may not raise any Ability above three dots using their initial Abilities points. They may, however, be raised using "freebie" points as usual.

Your **Advantages** come next. Your only Advantage is Backgrounds if you are playing an acolyte. Consors and familiars choose Backgrounds, but may choose to take five points worth of Special Advantages as well. Special Abilities include Hedge Magic, Psychic Phenomena and a host of other powers and forms. Consors automatically have the Mentor background at one dot and may choose only four more dots worth of Backgrounds with their initial Backgrounds points (These may, of course, be raised with "freebie" points).

The last few touches to your character include recording her base Willpower (custos begin with three points) and spending your "freebie" points. Servants and basic acolytes receive 15 "freebie" points, while consors and familiars have 21 "freebie" points to spend. Remember that "freebie" points are not spent on a one-per-one basis (See chart).

Merits and **Flaws** are optional Traits you may use to flesh out your character. They can add depth and provide further insight into the character's personality and motivations; they can also give additional powers or limitations. Merits cost "freebie" points, while Flaws give a character more "freebie" points to work with when chosen. No character may take more than seven points worth of Flaws and Merits unless doing so truly defines her Concept. Even then, Storyteller approval is required and caution is advised. Characters with too many Merits can severely disrupt a chronicle, while those with too many Flaws may find that they are too crippled to be of any use.

Supernatural Creatures

Some consors are vampires, ghouls, Garou or other werecreatures. To adequately portray all their attendant abilities (Garou Gifts, vampire Disciplines, etc.) and complex societies, these characters should use their own creation rules. Vampiric and werebeast custos are not allowed to take Special Advantages on top of their own. For details about these supernatural beings, see **Vampire**, **Werewolf** and their attendant **Players Guides**.

Character Creation Outline

Step One:

Character Concept: Who Are You?

- Identify Concept: Who were you before you encountered mages?
- Choose Motivation: Why have you involved yourself?
- Choose Affiliation: Traditions, Technocracy, Orphan, Nephandi or Marauder?
- Choose Type: Are you an acolyte, a consor or a familiar?
- Choose Nature and Demeanor (Optional): What is your personality?

Step Two:

What are your basic capabilities?

- Prioritize your 3 Categories: Primary 6, Secondary 4, Tertiary 3
- Choose Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity & Stamina
- Choose Social Attributes: Charisma, Manipulation & Appearance
- Choose Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence & Wits

Step Three:

Select Abilities: What do you know?

- Prioritize your 3 Categories: Primary 11, Secondary 7, Tertiary 4
- Choose Talents: Your innate, intuitive Abilities
- Choose Skills: Your trained Abilities
- Choose Knowledges: Your studied, memorized Abilities

Step Four:

Select Advantages: In what ways are you unique?

- Choose Background Traits: May be limited by chronicle concept (5 points). Consors must choose Mentor for at least one point of their backgrounds.
- Choose Special Advantages: Special consors and familiars only. These Traits may only be purchased with Background or “freebie” points and only during creation.

Step Five:

Last Touches: The All-Important Details

- Record Willpower (base 3 points)
- Spend your “freebie” points. Acolytes have 15 “freebie” points to spend; consors have 21 “freebie” points. Only certain consors can purchase Special Advantages.
- Choose Merits and Flaws (optional). You spend “freebie” points to purchase Merits and gain more “freebie” points for taking Flaws. You may only have up to 7 points in Flaws and Merits.

“Freebie” Points may also be used to raise any Trait at the following cost:

- Special Advantages (see next page for costs)
- Attributes (5 points for one dot)
- Abilities (2 points for one dot)
- Backgrounds and Willpower (1 point per Background dot, 2 points per Willpower dot)

Starting levels in Abilities and Special Advantages may not be higher than four dots.

Merits

- Loyalty (1)
- Hideaway (2)
- Faerie Companion (3)
- Shapechanger Kin (4)
- Ghoul (5)

Flaws

- Compulsive Speech (1-2)
- Conflicting Loyalties (1-3)
- Alien Appearance (1-5)
- Hero Worship (1)
- Whimsy (1)
- Bizarre Hunger (2-4)
- Double Agent (2)
- Hunchback (2)
- Thaumivore (5)

Special Advantages

- Animal Form (3 pts)
- Cause Insanity (varies)
- Chameleon Coloration (4/6/8)
- Claws, Fangs or Horns (3/5/7)
- Extra Limb(s) (3 pts per limb)
- Extra Speed (variable)
- Hazardous Breath (variable)
- Immunity (2/5/10/15)
- Information Font (3)
- Intangibility (8/10 pts)
- Musical Influence (3)
- Mystick Shield (varies)
- Nightsight (3)
- Numina (7+; see below)
- Physical Enhancement: (variable)
- Paradox Nullification (2-6)
- Shapechanger (3/5/8)
- Size (3/5/8)
- Symbiotic Knowledge (5)
- Umbral Travel (8/10/15)
- Water Breathing (2/5)
- Wings (3/5)

Hedge Magic

Successes Needed

- Standard task (Conjuring a card)
- Difficult task (Healing a gunshot wound)
- Impossible task (Binding a raging werewolf)

Path Listings

Path
Conjuration
Cursing
Enchantment
Ephemera
Healing
Herbalism/Brewing
Summoning, Binding and Warding

Effect
Pull things from "nowhere"
Cause bad fortune
Create minor talismans
Deal with spirits
Reduce pain or injury
Create potions
Call, Bind, Ward & Dismiss

Roll	Willpower cost
Dexterity + Occult	(no cost)
Manipulation + Intimidation	1 Willpower
Intelligence + Occult	1 Willpower
Charisma + Enigmas	(no cost)
Manipulation + Intuition	1 Willpower
Intelligence + Herbalism	(no cost)
Charisma + Occult to Summon	1 Willpower
Manipulation + Occult to Bind	(no cost)
Wits + Int. + Occult to Dismiss	1 Willpower
Wits + Occult to Ward	(no cost)

Psychic Phenomena

Phenomena

- Clairvoyance
- Psychokinesis
- Telepathy

- Extend perceptions
- Move objects mentally
- Read minds

- Perception + Alertness
- Wits + Athletics
- Intelligence + Intuition

- 1 Willpower
- 1 Willpower
- 1 Willpower

True Faith

Repels vampires with a successful contested roll of Faith rating vs. vampire's Willpower.
Also functions as one die of innate countermagick for each point of Faith.

Numina Quick Reference

Numina Affinities: Hedge Magic (divided into Paths), Psychic Phenomena (divided into different Phenomena), True Faith (not divided)

"Freebie" Point Costs

First Starting Affinity	7
Additional starting Affinities	14 each
Hedge Magic Costs	
Hedge Magic Paths	7 per dot
Each Ritual	3 each, one free with each Path dot
Psychic Phenomena Costs	
First Phenomenon	7 per dot
Each additional Phenomenon	14 for first dot, 7 for successive dots
True Faith Cost	7 per dot

Experience Costs

Hedge Magic	
Raising Path with experience.	current level x 7
New Paths	7 for first dot
New Rituals	corresponding Path level x 3, one free when Path dot purchased
Psychic Phenomena	
Raising a Phenomenon with experience	current level x 7
New Phenomenon	14 for first dot
True Faith	cannot be raised with experience

CUSTOS

MAGE: The Ascension™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Residence:

Affiliation:
Type:
Concept:

Attributes

Physical

Social

Mental

Strength _____ ●○○○○
Dexterity _____ ●○○○○
Stamina _____ ●○○○○

Charisma _____ ●○○○○
Manipulation _____ ●○○○○
Appearance _____ ●○○○○

Perception _____ ●○○○○
Intelligence _____ ●○○○○
Wits _____ ●○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Skills

Knowledges

Alertness _____ ○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

Drive _____ ○○○○○
Etiquette _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Leadership _____ ○○○○○
Meditation _____ ○○○○○
Melee _____ ○○○○○
Research _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ○○○○○
Survival _____ ○○○○○
Technology _____ ○○○○○

Computer _____ ○○○○○
Culture _____ ○○○○○
Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Law _____ ○○○○○
Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○
 ○○○○○

Advantages

Special Advantages

Backgrounds

Merits & Flaws

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
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Other Traits

Willpower
○○○○○○○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○

Health

_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
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Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

Bruised -0 ○
Hurt -1 ○
Injured -1 ○
Wounded -2 ○
Mauled -2 ○
Crippled -5 ○
Incapacitated ○

Experience

New Traits



Once, they were men. Now, they are land crabs.
— Attack of the Crab Monsters

The new Traits below (excepting the Special Advantages and the Thaumivore Flaw) can be added to virtually any Mage character. They are, however, especially applicable to custos and expand on the possibilities offered in *The Book of Shadows*.

New Knowledges

*Health that mocks the doctor's rules,
Knowledge never learned of schools*
— John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Barefoot Boy"

Familiar Lore

You have studied the ways of the spirit-beings who bond themselves to mages. Although they seem almost infinite in their variety, you have learned ways to categorize the creatures in both type and abilities. You know something of the nature and habits of these strange beings who come from the depths of the spirit-realm to join a mage in exploring the nature of reality. You comprehend at least a few aspects of the true nature of the mage-familiar relationship and know what types of familiars most often associate themselves with certain mages.

Merits and Flaws from *The Book of Shadows*

Many of the new Traits offered in *The Book of Shadows* are as appropriate to custos as they are to mages, if not moreso. Any Ability in that book (except for Blatancy) works well for companion characters. As for Merits and Flaws, those below come highly recommended for un-Awakened characters:

Psychological: All

Mental: All but Prodigy.

Awareness: All.

Aptitudes: All (these are especially apt for custos).

Supernatural: True Love (especially for one's mage), Danger Sense, Luck (good to have!), Unbondable, True Faith (see Numina), Spirit Magnet, Cursed, Magical Prohibition or Imperative, The Bard's Tongue, Spark of Life or Psychic Vampire (for familiars), Dark Fate (perhaps a mage can help you avoid it!).

Mage Ties: Any, if they apply to your association with your mage.

Sleeper Society: Any are good; they make you useful.

Physical: Any except Child (unless the mage is either your guardian, a child herself or a real pervert).



Omaha '95



The character must have at least two dots in either Spirit Lore, Cosmology or Occult Knowledge before purchasing this Knowledge at all. (This restriction does not apply to characters who *are* familiars.)

- **Student:** Well, it's got wings, a tail and three toes.
- **College:** Not only can you identify them as familiars, but you know many of the theories of their origin.
- **Masters:** You have a good grasp on Familiar Psych. 101 and are aware of the most common familiar powers.
- **Doctorate:** You know a great deal about the interactions between mages and familiars and have heard of a number of the more obscure familiar powers and quirks.
- **Scholar:** You know more about familiars than they do themselves. You can often tell what powers one may have simply by looking at it.

Possessed by: Sages, Mages, Consors, Familiars, Spirits

Varieties: Marauder, Nephandi, Tradition, Orphan-Drawn

Hearth Wisdom

Yours is the common wisdom of the wise peasant, a working knowledge of hidden things. Some call your skill "superstition" or "folklore," but you know the power simple items (cold iron, blessed wafers, gri-gri, herbal cures and such) have over the world of shade. Although this Knowledge does not grant you any form of magical ability, you can use supernatural beings' weaknesses (silver, holy words, fire, Fetters and such) against them. You may not comprehend the true intricacies of vampiric society, Garou ways, Shadowland politics or the Ascension War, but you can recount the secrets that commoners have always known about these mystic beings — secrets that hold more truth than those beings believe!

In game terms, this Knowledge grants you a supply of folk tales and simple charms which may or may not work in given situations. Characters with this wisdom might recognize a vampire, changeling, wizard or werecreature for what it is, even if it pretends to be otherwise, and may understand some fact which the Awakened one thinks is obscure. Hearth Wisdom might state: "Men go mad in the sight of moon-born and recall it not thereafter. Avoid angering those of bestial aspect," a helpful reference to the Delirium and Garou Rage. A successful Hearth Wisdom roll should offer a helpful insight into a supernatural threat and how to deal with it. The effectiveness of such insights are left to the Storyteller, but the better the roll, the more accurate the information should be. This is especially useful when coupled with True Faith or used against mages with the Echoes Flaw or vampires with the Flaws Taint of Corruption, Repelled by Crosses or Repulsed by Garlic.

Characters with Hearth Wisdom can also use simple remedies for colds, labor pains, fertility and such. Although not as potent as the Herbalism skill, such cures should have some effect. After all, many discoveries of modern medicine and ancient healing are based in so-called "old wives' tales."



- **Insightful:** You know a few bits of lore from your native culture.

- **Clever:** You recognize the traces the supernatural has left on our world, even if others don't.

- **Knowledgeable:** People come to you for advice and minor cures. You are familiar with lore from other cultures, though you're not well-versed in it.

- **Learned:** You are a fountain of lore and remedies from your native culture and others as well. You can spot a supernatural being with a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) if you get close enough, and you know the things he fears.

- **Wise:** Though not a scholar, you are versed in folklore from every part of the world. Those who respect your wisdom undertake pilgrimages to ask you for advice. Although your knowledge is cloaked in riddles and stories, you understand more about the shadow world than many of its denizens do.

Possessed by: Village Elders, Old Wives, Supernatural Hunters, Witches and Witch Doctors, Folklore Researchers, Arcanum Investigators, Hermits, Herbalists, Farmers, Game Designers

Specialties: Northern European, Native American, Appalachian, Central African, Amazon Native, Caribbean, Eastern European, Gypsy, Vagabond Lore, Eastern Mystic, Outback, Grassland, Pacific Island, Mediterranean

Spirit Lore

Thoughts of the great beyond often fill your mind. Your attention often focuses on the spirit world which parallels our own and its multitude of mysterious inhabitants. Moreover, you have some practical knowledge concerning the inhabitants of these Realms. You know of the different regions dividing the spirit world, and you also understand the distinction between spirits and wraiths. If you have devoted your attention to this study long enough, you may also be able to read and interpret arcane texts on spirits and their Realms.

This Knowledge cannot be bought during creation unless the character is a spirit, mythic beast or familiar. Humans can only purchase this Ability with experience.

- **Student:** You've read a lot of roleplaying games.

- **College:** You frequent séances and own a number of Victorian spiritualism books.

- **Masters:** You have an extensive library on spirits and their lands.

- **Doctorate:** You are a recognized expert and renowned author in the study of spirits.

- **Scholar:** The spirits ask you for advice.

Possessed by: Custos, Garou, Kindred, Mages, Occultists, Sages, Spirits

Varieties: Ghosts, High Umbra, Middle Umbra, Specific Spirits, Cosmic Hierarchies, Animism

Merits and Flaws

Charms strike the sight, but merit
Wins the soul.

— Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*

Custos have some particular Merits and Flaws that suit their natures. Merits will benefit to the characters while Flaws act to their detriment. Some Merits and Flaws will have little effect on the game besides style, but others may unbalance an entire chronicle and should be handled with care. Here are a few new ones for custos:

Loyalty: (1 pt Merit)

You are a loyal and devoted individual. The object of this loyalty may be either a particular individual (your mage, lover, etc.) or a group or cause (your Chantry, Greenpeace, etc.). You easily resist almost all temptations toward disloyalty. If you are facing supernatural persuasion (Mind magick, etc.) to betray your master or cause, your effective Willpower is increased by two due to your extreme loyalty.

Hideaway: (2 pt Merit)

You own a special hideaway—a house, cottage or other building that no one knows about but you. It has never been registered in your name or linked to you in any way, making it quite unlikely that anyone could trace you there. It is modestly furnished, and you keep it stocked with necessities for about a two week stay. Such places are good for hiding from all the various enemies a mage and his consorts might make.

Once each game in which the hideaway plays an active part (i.e. one when people might discover it), the Storyteller will call for a roll on two dice with a difficulty of 6. Success (at least one six) means no one has discovered the hideaway. Failure indicates that you didn't adequately cover your tracks, and your foes know the general vicinity of your property. Four such cumulative failures lead them right to you, while a botch immediately renders your secret worthless.

Faerie Companion: (3 pt Merit)

You have a faerie companion, a friend and associate who's one of the wee folk—the changelings. Perhaps he is a Muse of yours, or your creativity feeds his craving for dreams. In any case, this fae companion tends to stay out





This does not come without cost, however. You must continue to feed on vampire blood occasionally, otherwise you will regain your mundane mortality and crave forever the sweet rush of your former mistress' essence. Should you revert (after going a month or more without the sacred vitae), you will lose your supernatural might forever.

Compulsive Speech: (1-2 pt Flaw)

You are compelled to speak in some manner which is against your own best interests. You find it impossible to stop yourself from being rude and blunt when finesse is called for, telling a self-aggrandizing lie when it is obviously not the truth, criticizing someone or her work when your opinion has not been asked or when you actually know very little about the subject, or telling the absolute truth when a small fib or white lie would smooth the way.

Choose one of these (or some other equally obnoxious tendency). A one point Flaw means you only do it some of the time when you are speaking to those you consider equals or inferiors. A two point Flaw means you say such things to everyone, regardless of their relationship to you. Spending a point of Willpower allows you to ignore the urge for one scene.

Conflicting Loyalties: (1-3 pt Flaw)

You are a very loyal individual (and undoubtedly possess the Loyal Merit). Unfortunately, one or more of the people or things you feel great loyalty towards are in conflict. Even if the conflict is currently submerged beneath other concerns, you know that one day you will be forced to make one or more anguish-filled choices.

What will happen when your sister discovers that your mage is the man who killed her child? You know it was an accident, but you also know your sister will never rest until she avenges her baby. Yet you are desperately in love with your mage... You can only hope that you can find some way to reconcile your conflicts before you are torn apart by your need to fulfill the responsibilities of your conflicting loyalties.

The extent and immediacy of the conflict determines the point cost of this Flaw; the greater and/or more immediate the conflict, the larger the Flaw.

Alien Appearance: (1-5 pt Flaw)

You have an appearance that marks you as different from normal humans (or cats or whatever). You are more noticeable and easily remembered because of your bizarre appearance. At level one, you may only have a minor difference such as plaid eyes or fangs which are visible when you speak, while at level five you are such an oddity (a tiger tail, elephant ears, blue skin) that you must remain covered wherever you go to avoid upsetting the Sleepers. If you can convince someone you're in theatrical makeup, of course...

This Flaw is often possessed by Umbral beasties and some familiars.

Hero Worship: (1 pt Flaw)

You regard another individual, most probably your mage, with respect that approaches reverence. The object of your hero worship can literally do no wrong in your eyes, which can lead to some serious disputes with your fellows. You must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) to disobey an instruction given by your hero. In your eyes, he is perfect. In fact, you add +1 difficulty to any roll in which success would require you to admit that your hero is wrong.

Whimsy: (1 pt Flaw)

You become whimsical under stress. Rather than getting serious when things go wrong, you tend to get tickled and adopt a fey attitude. While this can occasionally be so disarming that foes are caught off-guard (perhaps giving you another chance to best them), it usually prevents you from doing anything particularly helpful for one turn and really annoys your companions.

Bizarre Hunger: (2-4 pt Flaw)

You have very odd dietary needs. Rather than normal food, you must consume some odd or disgusting substance in order to maintain your health. If you are unable to acquire and consume your required substance, you begin losing Health Levels at the rate of one per day after your first day of fasting. Although you may eat "normal" food as well, you derive no sustenance from it.

Eating such odd fare is bound to attract attention if you do it in public. Some substances are also harder to get than others. In general, the more disgusting the substance required or the more difficult it is to obtain, the greater the Flaw. Examples:

- 2 pts Pig's blood, iodine, cat food (unless you *are* a cat)
- 3 pts Heroin, rotten meat, mare's milk
- 4 pts Child's blood, gold, feces

Double Agent: (2 pt Flaw)

You are a double agent, secretly working for another faction in the Ascension War. If you associate with a Tradition mage, you secretly work for the Technocracy, the Nephandi or the Marauders. Whoever you actually work for will eventually make demands which place you in an awkward position. Should your actual role in affairs be discovered, you would be reviled (at the very least).

Hunchback: (2 pt Flaw)

Almost expected of Son of Ether servants, this deformity hinders your movement and focuses the scorn of those who walk upright. Some day, they'll pay... Add 1 to all Social difficulties (regardless of how your face looks) and Dexterity-based Attribute rolls.



Omaha '95

Thaumivore: (5 pt Flaw)

You are one of the Bygone, a mythic beast shut off from the Earth by the powers of disbelief, the death of magick. In the spirit world, you found a home, until some purpose, friend or compulsion brought you back to the material world. To stay alive here, though, you must consume raw magick — Quintessence, in Tass or Prime form.

This Flaw resembles Bizarre Hunger, except that your food is Quintessence. In one form or another, you must consume at least one point of Quintessence per day or suffer pangs of deadly hunger (most Thaumidores require much more than that to stay in fighting trim). After no more than a week of starvation, your physical form will deteriorate to rotted nothing. During that time, you will lose Health Levels, endure Dice Pool penalties, and generally suffer. An eating binge will satisfy your hunger for a time, but the more you eat, the more you'll crave.

This diet is almost guaranteed to get you and your companions in trouble. If you cultivate a taste in a certain "flavor" of Quintessence (distilled by hate, love, anguish, sacrifice, etc.), you may not want any other kind. If your demands are not met, you may turn and eat your mage out of Node and home, munch on Talismans, or just depart in a huff, returning to the more hospitable Realms.

Special Advantages

E's invisible! That's wots the matter wi' im!

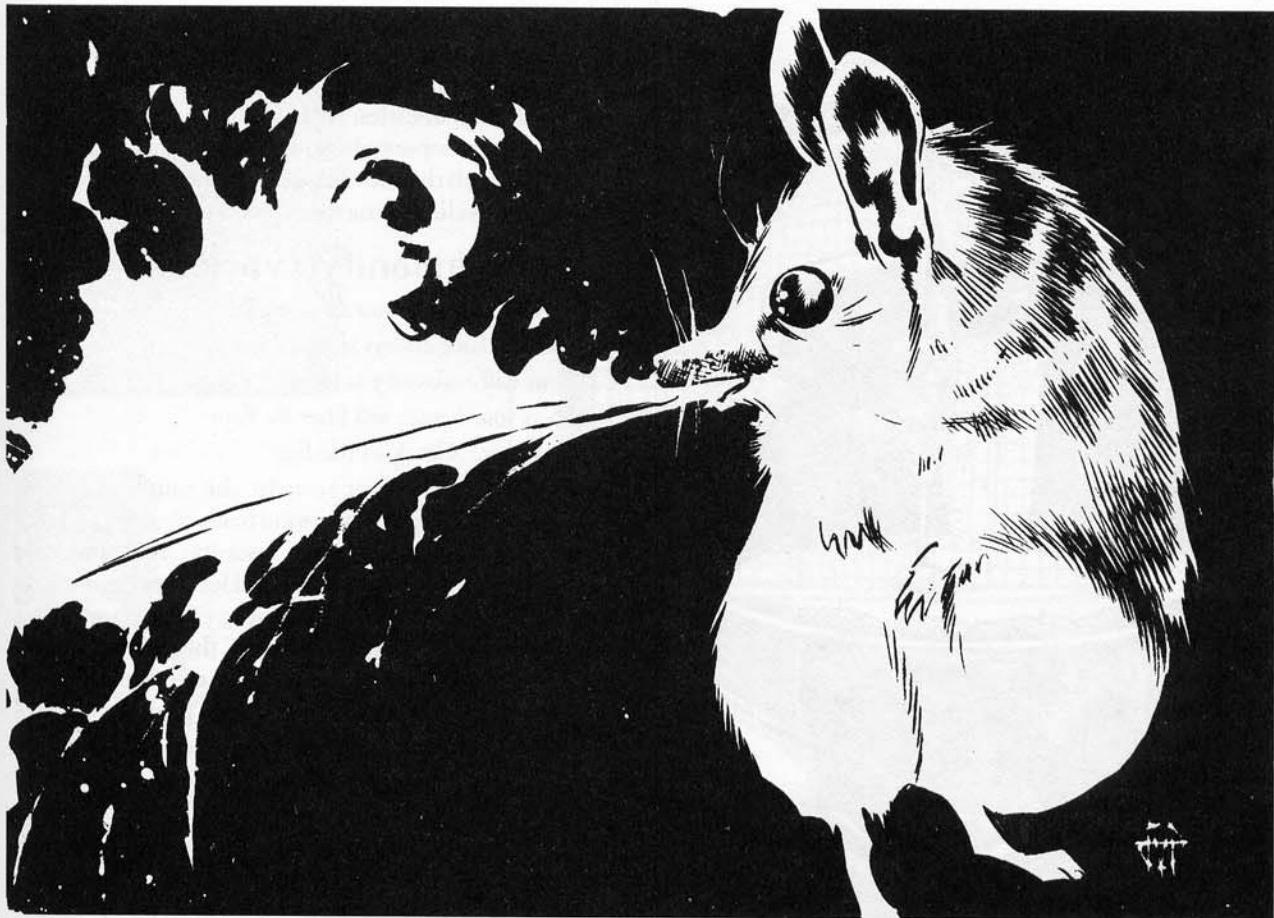
— *The Invisible Man*

The special Traits below are the providence of the paranormal. Normal human beings cannot purchase these weird powers without some sort of supernatural tinkering (which is not generally a good idea in the long run!). These special Advantages are intended for consors and familiars from odd places — Horizon Realms, Technocracy laboratories, the twisted corners of Nephandi-held lands and out-of-the-way places that reality forgot.

Conventional reality is not kind to creatures with these abilities (note the prejudice inherent in calling them "creatures" to begin with!). In the harsh light of the Technocratic paradigm, outlandish beings quickly grow sick and sometimes even die. A fanged zebra with wings will not last long on this world (see "Unbelief" in *The Book of Madness*). The climate does not agree with their kind. While secret hidden places shelter beings far beyond our comprehension, such entities do not usually wander down Main Street without problems.

With these Traits, Storytellers and players can create the more bizarre types of magickal companions — talking wolves, golems, unicorns and such. Only consors and familiars may purchase these Advantages and only during character creation with Background or "freebie" points.





Some Advantages, such as Hazardous Breath, Physical Enhancement, Numina and Immunity, may be bought up with experience, but the ability *must* exist from the beginning for it to be added to later.

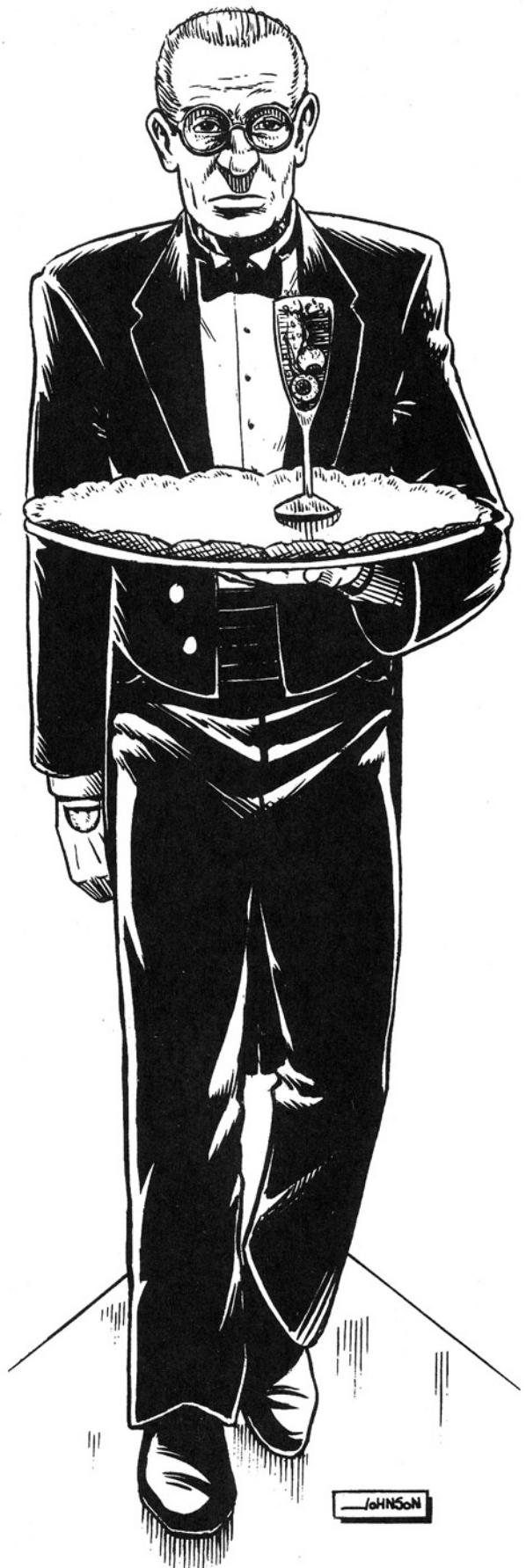
Although Paradox will not instantly strike down a being with these powers, it may erode their existence (see above). At the least, it will make them uncomfortable in plain sight of mundane folks. Those same people will probably be distressed to find an unearthly beastie in their midst as well. They might go running straight to the *National Enquirer* — or to a gun store!

With the exception of Numina, these Advantages are beyond "normal" human beings, as they involve some sort of physical or magickal characteristic mortals do not share. Some, like wings, will be obvious to anyone who sees them. More subtle mutations, like fangs or cybernetics, are generally inconspicuous but still abnormal. Storytellers should not allow human mages to purchase these Advantages; used carelessly, such Traits can turn a serious game into a goofy comic book. Naturally, there are some merits to an off-the-wall kind of game, but flamboyant superpowers really aren't appropriate for the Gothic-Punk setting. These Advantages, and creatures with them, are *rare*!

Animal Form: (3 pts)

Although your corsor is intelligent and empowered, she is (or appears to be) an animal of some sort — a cat, a bear, a hawk, a horse, etc. This has no effect on Mental Attributes, but may affect the Physical and Social ones and will definitely prove to be both help and hindrance, depending on the circumstances. Most societies require some kind of control over animals — leashes, licenses, impoundment, shots and such — and will not often allow them into buildings or meetings. People rarely take unusual "beasts" seriously, and some may want to hunt them, collect them or purchase them. All the same, animals, especially small ones, can often get into places no human could reach and may overhear things no person would choose to reveal.

If you choose to run an animal (or something which resembles one), first decide what type you want to be, then figure your Attributes accordingly. Mammals tend to have higher Social Traits than reptiles or birds, although this is largely a judgment call (is a snake more charismatic than a monkey?). Physical Attributes will usually figure most prominently in an animal companion.



This Advantage allows the character the natural form of some kind of animal — the type itself is unimportant. The animal can still talk normally if the player desires. Natural abilities, such as Claws, Wings, or Size, must be bought separately from this list. Magickal beasts are possible with this Advantage, but their powers must be purchased as well, making them pretty expensive to build.

Cause Insanity: (varies)

*Parasitical scum, you die so easily
But you have always sickened me
Your will enslaved you grovel for more
Soon your bowels will litter the floor*
— Gwar, "Crack in the Egg"

You have the power to twist the minds of others, dragging them away from the solid roads of sanity and into the rotting, fevered jungles of insanity. You are a true maestro of your art. Every twitch and leer taps out another perfect crack on the brittle housing of your audience's mind. Few mortals can long resist the power of your performance, and they offer up their minds to you like fragrant bouquets, acknowledging your genius.

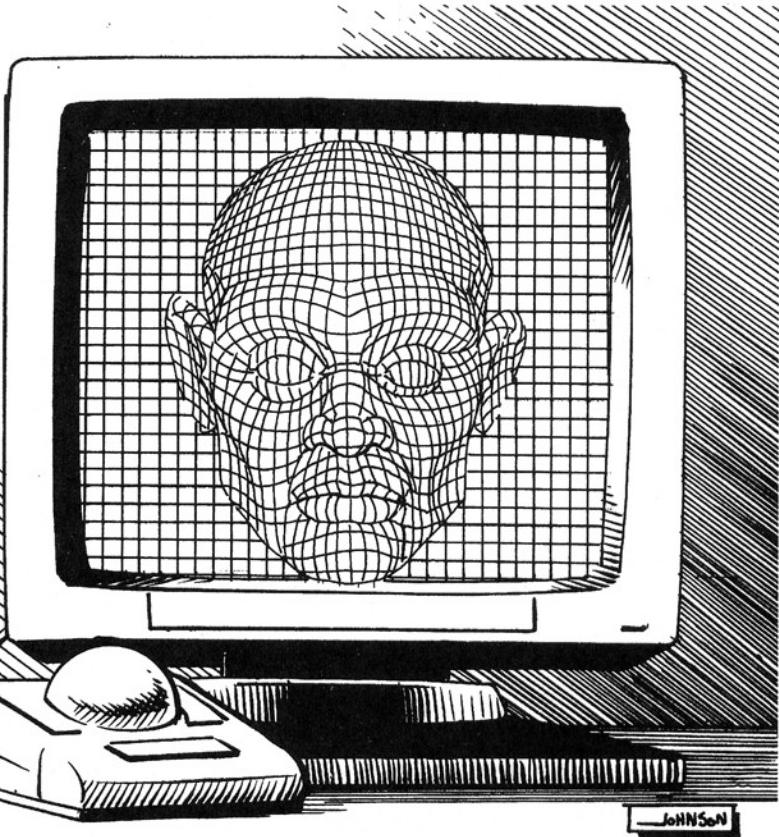
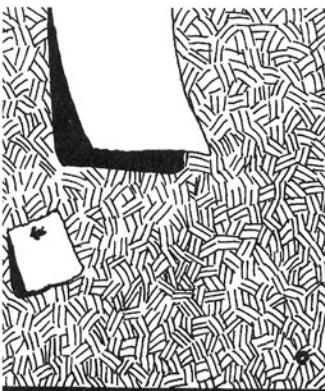
This foul power is normally possessed by beings allied with Nephandi or Marauders. The means each familiar uses to cause insanity varies according to its physical form and personal twisted preferences. Some open windows into the deep Umbra, allowing unsuspecting victims to view the horrors therein. Others revel in performances involving crazy gibbering and insidious conversation to eat away at sanity, while still other familiars graphically transform their bodies into monstrous horrors.

Whatever method the familiar uses, the player rolls one die for every two points in the pool, with the difficulty being the target's Willpower. If the character only gets one to two successes, the Storyteller determines the type of insanity caused. If the familiar wins three or more successes, the player may decide what form of dementia she inflicts. The length and severity of the madness depends on the number of successes rolled as well; one or two successes might inflict a minor phobia, while five or more could ring in a full-blown freak-out. Such insanity can be cured with patient psychotherapy or Mind magicks.

Chameleon Coloration: (4/6/8 pts)

This Advantage allows the character to change color, blending in with her surroundings. Such a transformation will take one to three turns, depending on how radical the change is. A variation on this power, Shadowwalking, lets the character darken her skin to blend into surrounding shadows.

Changing color does not require a roll. People trying to see the character, however, must roll Wits + Alertness, difficulty 7, to see her. Shadowwalking costs 4 points. Shifting hues within a single color (red, brown, etc.) costs 6 points, and changing to fit any color background costs 8 points.



Claws, Fangs or Horns: (3/5/7 pts)

With this natural weaponry, a companion may bite, gore or slash his opponents if he is so inclined. These appendages may be cybernetic implants, custom-built weapons or real fangs and claws, but they are not generally removable without injury (though they could be sheathed). For three points, the character may have one type of attack; for five points, two. Seven points will buy all three. These attacks do not normally do aggravated damage. If the Storyteller allows it, however, a mythic beast (unicorn, dragonet, etc.) may inflict aggravated wounds with its attacks for double the usual cost (6/10/14).

Maneuver Difficulty Damage

Bite:	5	Strength + 1
Claw:	6	Strength + 2
Gore:	7	Strength + 2 (Strength + 4 if the character has just moved 10 yards or more)

Extra Limb(s) (3 pts per limb)

You have one more limb than the average human being. This might be an extra arm, a tail, facial tentacles or something like that. Such a limb comes in awfully "handy" at times. This Advantage is most commonly possessed by familiars, but other unusual custos (cyborgs, Horizon beasties, lab "accidents") may take it as well with some sort of good explanation.

This Advantage might allow you an additional melee attack each turn (with -1 to both die pools), in addition to that extra hand to juggle the groceries, keys and wallet! Of course, you do look a bit unusual and may have to hide your appearance from the easily startled Sleepers that surround you. This Advantage can be purchased more than once, but costs 3 points for each new limb.

Extra Speed: (variable)

This allows a companion to outmaneuver a normal human. For every 5 points (up to a maximum of 10), the consor may take one extra action per turn without splitting her die pool. When moving, this allows the character to multiply a normal human's speed by x 1.5 for each five points spent.

Normal human	5 pts	10 pts
Walk 7 yds/turn	11	14
Jog 13 yds/turn	20	26
Run 20 yds/turn	30	40

Hazardous Breath: (variable)

The dragon lives! A mythic companion with this Advantage can blast out some sort of dangerous substance on command — fire, bullets, poison gas, acidic spittle, etc. The attack need not really be a breath weapon; any sort of long-range hazard will do. This ability is potent and uncommon. Storytellers should consider beforehand whether they wish to allow players to buy this attack.

For every five points spent, the character inflicts one Health Level of damage with its breath with a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll (difficulty 7). The exact specifications of the attack depend on its nature. A blast of flame will have a quicker effect than a gout of deadly goo.

For seven points per Health Level, the damage can be caustic, inflicting an additional Health Level per damage level each turn until the stuff is washed up or the target dies. Napalm, caustic glop, gas and toxic waste are good examples of this kind of hazard. Either kind of damage can be soaked.

Breath weapons usually cause normal damage unless the target is vulnerable to that attack (vampires and fire, for example). For double the usual cost, the damage can be aggravated. Under most circumstances, this weapon can be used once per scene for every point of Stamina the character possesses. Range is the Storyteller's discretion and will vary from attack to attack (lightning bolts will carry further than acidic drool). If the hazard could potentially hurt more than one target at a time, assume that each success above the first allows an additional victim to be hurt if he is within range of the attack (roughly two yards or less from the initial target).

Immunity: (2/5/10/15 pts)

A being with this Advantage can ignore the effects of some kinds of potentially dangerous things. It's mostly intended for robots, golems, cyborgs and odd Horizon

Beasties, but can be used to reflect an especially tough or conditioned person ("I've spent years building up an immunity to iocane powder...").

Players must have some reason to grant their characters physical immunities — they do not simply occur. Each kind of resistance must be bought separately; thus, becoming immune to everything is extremely expensive.

2 pts Some minor nuisance (poison ivy, common cold or flu, minor temperature changes)

5 pts Major threat (diseases, venoms, temperature extremes, hunger)

10 pts Terminal effects (electricity, fire, age, deadly poisons, radiation, icy cold)

15 pts Death (character is essentially immortal, but can be hurt or even crippled. Some sort of doom can still befall him, though he may not know what it is.)

Information Font: (3 pts)

All familiars have access to information not readily available to their patrons. They also view the world from radically different perspectives; they have, after all, traveled other lands and other dimensions, and it shows. For the same reason, familiars are often reservoirs of vast amounts of knowledge not always easily accessible to even the most esoterically versed of mages. Of course, these same familiars might get the heebie-jeebies from opening a refrigerator or watching a TV sit-com. Such is culture shock.





All familiars come up with bizarre, yet helpful information at random and unpredictable intervals. This data is almost always cryptic to both mage and familiar, although for opposite reasons. It is often exceedingly difficult for the familiar to relate its knowledge to the physical world around it. They are truly "strangers in a strange land" and often have difficulties fitting the truths of one realm of experience into the framework of an entirely different one. Like people barely fluent in a second language, familiars often have problems translating complex, esoteric concepts from one language to the next. Likewise, the familiar's internal translations are often a bit haphazard. This garbled wisdom comes through to the mage in ways the familiar feels should be utterly comprehensible, but are not. Nevertheless, the familiar's mage can often complete the translation through her understanding of this realm of existence. Indeed, a number of familiars feel this translation service is one of the most useful advantages of taking on a mage.

This complex flow of insight is best reflected in off-the-wall roleplaying. When a system is needed, however, occasional Perception + Knowledge rolls could be used. The nature of the Ability should be matched to the situation — either totally appropriate or wildly inappropriate! To understand these outer reaches of esoteric knowledge at any time, a puzzled mage's player should roll Intelligence + Enigmas with a difficulty ranging from moderate to impossible, depending on how weird the input is. The clarity and usefulness of the information dredged up depends on the number of successes received. The greater the number of successes, the better the information is understood.

Intangibility: (8/10 pts)

Where'd she go? A companion with this rare Advantage can either disappear from plain sight (eight points) or become totally incorporeal (10 points). Either option can be a hassle for Storytellers, who may choose to disallow this Advantage for player characters.

Going Intangible does not normally require a roll, but it does cost one point of Willpower each time the companion changes from one state to another. Running out of Willpower will trap her in whatever state she was in until she can get herself back together.

A creature who simply disappears will confound any normal observer or surveillance equipment, although motion sensors, IR and UV gear, laser spotters, vampiric Auspex, Lifesight and sensing Gifts and magicks will detect her on a normal Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). This Advantage does nothing to hide any odors or sounds the character might emit, either. A sharp observer can notice an invisible companion by the effect she has on her environment (Perception + Alertness difficulty 9).

Going totally Intangible renders the companion immune to any sort of physical obstacle or force. Mystick forces, including True Faith and Numina, still affect an Intangible character normally. The character herself, however, cannot orient onto a physical target while insubstantial; she must reform before she can turn those energies outward. She can still be seen by mortal sight, but vaguely (Perception + Alertness or Awareness, difficulty 8).

This Advantage simulates spirits who drift from flesh to formlessness. It should not be allowed for non-ephemeral beings without an excellent explanation.

Musical Influence: (3 pts)

A companion with this Advantage can sing, hum, wail or howl in some unusually expressive way. With a successful Social Attribute + Ability roll (difficulty is target's Willpower), the character can charm, cheer, depress or terrify anyone within hearing range.

Manipulation is the most common Attribute coupled with this Advantage, although Charisma might also work. Appropriate Attributes include Expression, Intimidation (to raise chills), Seduction (to lure someone to his doom), Ventriloquism (to throw the sound), Mimicry (to mirror another's song), Animal Training (to influence animals), Singing and even Torture and Hypnotize (for really unusual effects). The feelings engendered by this song are pretty surface-level; this ability weaves a mood, not a mind-altering spell. Still, the emotional effect of a good roll ought to color any subject's attitude for a while to come.

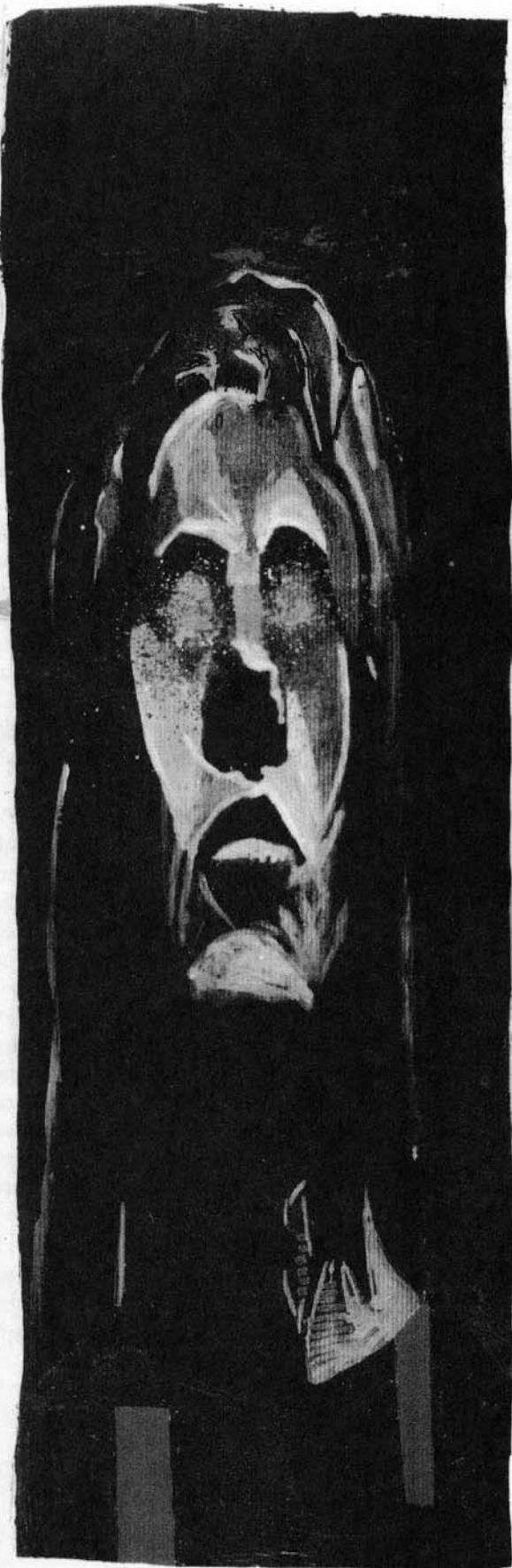
Mystick Shield: (varies)

This power, common among familiars, lets you focus limited magickal forces to save your butt from magickal attacks. Although this protection isn't perfect, it's a heck of a lot better than doing nothing in the face of a determined mage or slavering demon!

Some familiars with this power have a magickal, yet natural, resistance to magick attacks. Spell energies seems to wash over them, they happen to be behind cover during the explosion, and you never can quite get a bead on their brains with those psychic attacks. Others can throw up sudden shields to intercept incoming magicks. Whatever the effects might be, players should decide the nature of their characters' resistance beforehand.

Every two points in the Advantage grants your character one die of countermagick or adds +1 to the difficulty of a mystick attack directed at her (not both at once). The power acts like a Dodge. To attempt it while doing other things, subtract the dice in the shield from your normal total. Whipping the shield up merely takes a declared action during Initiative.





Nightsight: (3 pts)

The effect of this Advantage is simple: the character can see in the dark so long as some dim light source exists. This source can even include self-mounted spotlights in the case of robots. Unusually bad conditions (smoke, fog, total darkness) may demand a Perception + Alertness roll, with difficulties dependent on the circumstances.

Numina: (7 pts+)

These unusual abilities include Hedge Magic, True Faith and Psychic Phenomena. Normal humans can use these Advantages, although they're pretty rare. See Chapter Five for details about Numina.

Physical Enhancement: (variable)

Players who wish to run companions stronger, tougher or faster than humans have come to the right place. For each five "freebie" points spent, you may buy another dot for your character's Physical Attributes (to put them above 5), buy an additional soak die for absorbing damage, or add one more Health Level to your custos' total. This could reflect minor cybernetic enhancement, built-in armor, steroids or just natural agility, power or mass.

Storytellers should be careful, lest this Advantage get out of control. A maximum cap of 8 for Attributes and three extra Health Levels or soak dice is recommended.

Paradox Nullification: (2-5 pts)

Familiars can absorb and nullify a certain amount of Paradox energies. Some speculate that the Bygone consume the banality of the world that has largely rejected them. This talent is one of the more prominent reasons why mages search out familiars. The companions themselves maintain that this ability meshes so well with the needs of the Paradox-ridden mages that they must be meant to be together.

This Advantage comes naturally to most familiars. The amount of Paradox one absorbs and nullifies varies from individual to individual.

- 2 pts Absorb up to one point of Paradox per month.
- 3 pts Eat up to one point of Paradox biweekly.
- 4 pts Consume a point of Paradox per week.
- 5 pts Snack on up to two points of Paradox per week.
- 6 pts Absorb up to a point of Paradox per day.

Shapechanger: (3/5/8 pts)

Some corsors have many different shapes and guises; this tricky Advantage lets a character shift forms. It's a pretty vulgar power and an unusual one. Storytellers should feel free to restrict or disallow this ability if they fear its abuse.

Transformation usually takes one turn, although the nature of the change may dictate a slower or quicker shift. Any clothing, equipment or weapons should be discarded

first unless the new form could carry them as well. Changing shape in public is not wise, as strange backlashes have been known to happen. Even if the consor avoids a metaphysical rebuke, folks who witness beings changing shape tend to react with either fear, madness or curiosity — any one of which could be fatal to the shapeshifter!

This power only grants the ability to change shape. Any non-human characteristics of the new form must be purchased with the appropriate Advantages. If Valgreth the Incamani were to shift from human form into a white falcon, he would also have to purchase wings, claws and reduced size, regardless of which form was his real one.

A shapeshifter is easily detectable as a magickal being if one knows how to look (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 7, or any number of Life, Prime or Spirit magicks). He should also have some sort of good background reason for his power — it is not an talent easy to come by. Such shapeshifters are not true werecreatures and are not protected by the effects of the Delirium (see Werewolf), though they may pass as Gaia's Chosen to the uninitiated. This is, however, an innate power. It cannot be stopped by an outside party without transforming the companion himself.

Players may wish to list their alternate form(s), with their attendant Advantages, either on the back of their character sheet or on a separate one. Unless the new form dictates otherwise (see Size and Animal Form) or the player desires differently, the Attributes and Abilities of the new form(s) are the same as the old. If the character stays in different forms for long periods of time, his player may, with Storyteller permission, buy Talents, Skills or Knowledges unique to one form or the other.

3 pts Character has one alternate form.

5 pts He can transform into anything within a certain group (people, fish, cats, mythic beasts, mind-shattering horrors, etc.).

8 pts He can change into anything if he has enough Advantages that apply.

Size: (3/5/8 pts)

Characters within the human size range should consider the four point Huge Merit or the one point Short Flaw (see *The Book of Shadows*). If your companion is considerably larger or smaller, however, the following Advantages apply:

3 pts A bit larger (pony, lion) or smaller (mastiff, cheetah) than human.

5 pts A lot larger (horse, tiger, boa) or smaller (poodle, housecat, barracuda) than human.

8 pts Considerably larger (rhino, great white shark, small tree) or smaller (mouse, goshawk, sea urchin) than human.

Each size level adds or subtracts one Health Level to the amount of damage the character can withstand (note that a rat with four Health Levels is still a pretty tough rat!) and gives or takes one additional point of either Strength or Stamina.

Although it seems like larger characters come off better than smaller ones at first glance, consider what... inconveniences a massive being has when hiding, getting into cramped places, and evading attacks. Companions with two levels of size either add or subtract 1 from their opponents' difficulties to hit them or spot them; ones with three add or subtract 2.

Symbiotic Knowledge: (5 pts)

You have an extremely close relationship with your mage. In fact, you have entered each others' consciousness to such an extent that you now know some of what she knows. In the same manner, your mage has doubtless absorbed some wisdom of your own. This shared knowledge has aided your understanding of each other and allows you to share thoughts through a mental bond.

This power, a very common one between mages and familiars, creates an empathic channel between the two. It is not thoughts that are exchanged so much as hunches. Through this bond, both parties can utilize any Knowledge that the other possesses, so long as the two are in the same room. This is an intuitive understanding, not instruction. The Ability fades when the channel is closed, although either party may teach the other that Knowledge at leisure. Both familiar and mage must make a conscious decision to share their wisdom. For especially complex transmissions, like trying to pass on your understanding of quantum physics, both parties might have to make Wits + Intuition rolls with the level of the Knowledge + 3 as the difficulty.

The strengths and liabilities of such empathic transmissions should be obvious. If either mage or familiar is pissed off, in love, agitated or otherwise impassioned, those sentiments (and the reasons behind them) are unflinchingly clear to the other partner. This is great when relations are good, or when one of the partners is in trouble, but can be disastrous if one is trying to keep secrets from the other.

Umbral Travel: (8/10/15 pts)

You can "step sideways" into one of the three Umbral realms that exist near the mage's home reality. All you need do is peer into a reflective surface or dive through a pool of water, and you're there. Well, okay, so it's not quite that easy, but it sure beats taking the bus!

Moving through the Gauntlet requires spending a point of Willpower and rolling five dice against difficulty 7 (or the Gauntlet rating, if you prefer):

Successes

Botch	Failure, lose Willpower point (or get stuck!!)
None	Failure, try again
One	Three turns to pass through
Two	Takes two turns
Three, four	Takes one turn
Five or more	Instant passage

Sample beginning character: Valgreth the Incamani

Attributes (parenthesis indicate white hawk form): Strength 3 (2), Dexterity 4, Stamina 2 (1), Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Subterfuge 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Meditation 1, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Cosmology 2, Linguistics 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Arcane 2, Mentor 2

Willpower: 3

Merits and Flaws: Acute Sight +1, Compulsive Speech -2, Curiosity -2

Advantages: Shapeshift 3, (Animal Form 3, Size level 3-8, Wings 3, Beak and Claws 5). Total freebies spent: 23

Background: Valgreth's mother claimed he was birthed of a vision she shared with the great shaman Laughing Eagle. The mage himself has no comment, but seems kind enough to the young man, especially considering the latter's sharp and ready tongue. Raised in the Gray Squirrel's protectorate, Valgreth alienated many of his tribe by the time he passed puberty. His good looks and nasty wit enticed the girls, but did not endear him to their parents. By 16, he wandered the plains alone, seeking friends who could appreciate his wisdom. Despite his obnoxious ways, he was wise.

From childhood, Valgreth knew the power of the hawk, his chosen guardian and soul-companion. He understood the hawk so well that the spirit gifted him with the power to transform, to wing through the updrafts and learn the ways of nature unbound. In time, his abrasive temper mellowed. He still holds forth on anything he pleases, but his jokes are gentler and his observations more guarded.

Once in the Penumbra, you can travel to the Umbral Realms (assuming you know how!). The layer of Shadow that you pass into, however, depends on the your character's nature and conception. Most Bygones will be drawn instinctively to the Middle Umbra, where they feel safest. Highly refined companions (especially familiars) may pass on to the High Realms. A handful of death-bound consors can even delve into the Shadowlands, though they can go no further than the dead reflection of the living world. Only the rarest of companions can travel into more than one of the Three Worlds.

Basic Umbral travel (into one chosen World) costs eight points; it costs 10 points to go into two Worlds, and 15 to be able to reach any of the three. Storyteller may feel free to restrict or disallow this Advantage. For more information on the Otherworlds, see Werewolf, Wraith: The Oblivion, Haunts, Necropolis Atlanta, Umbra: The Velvet Shadow, The Book of Madness and The Book of Shadows.

Water Breathing: (2/5 pts)

With this simple power, a consor may either breathe underwater or, for five points, need not breathe at all. This Advantage also confers a certain degree of resistance to

He fell in with Gail Holsombake while the latter was visionquesting herself. Their mutual curiosity and sarcasm ignited a friendship that has endured three years of constant company. While he has never used the word "love" in reference to Gail, Valgreth has deep feelings for his Verbena pal. He often accompanies her on her journeys away from their Realm, perched on her shoulder in his white hawk guise or lounging in weathered denim somewhere nearby.

Image: A rakish Apache in his early 20s, Valgreth shows his affinity for the hawk in his sharp features and lean build. He usually wears ragged jeans and a denim jacket and ties his long black hair back. A sarcastic smile often plays about his mouth, and his witticisms sting those he distrusts. Despite his unspoken relationship with Gail, he flirts constantly, and his "subjects" usually respond in kind. In hawk form, Valgreth's wings span nearly five feet and his feathers glow a soft, snowy white. Twin black-feathered stripes beneath his eyes mark him as chosen of the hawk for those who understand. He will not, however, explain what an "Incamani" is. This is his little secret.

Roleplaying Notes: A know-it-all who really does understand a great deal, you trust your rangy looks and enigmatic aura to bring lots of fun your way. Smile with the promise of more, and give away none of it.

Despite your contempt for most whites, you find the wild variety of their world fascinating and the insolence of their manners a comforting change from your more conservative upbringing. Gail has passed her interest in anthropology on to you, and you seek the causes behind the effects. Still, you like your silence. Nothing thrills you like the brush of clean air across your wingtips and the blood tang of a kill.

underwater pressures and decompression problems, although considerable depths or radical changes (going from 500 feet to 30 in less than a minute) will cause some damage.

Wings: (3/5 pts)

This obvious Advantage grants a consor the ability to fly. The name is a bit misleading. The character does not actually have to have wings, though her player will need a good rationale to purchase non-winged flight. However she moves, she may hover, glide, soar or float about, depending on the nature of her power.

For three points, the companion may fly at up to normal human jogging speed (13 yards/turn). For five, she may cover 20 yards per turn. With effort, winged fliers may push their speed by adding their Dexterity score to their flight velocity for short bursts.

The inconveniences posed by these limbs should be obvious. Some wings are obvious, while others only appear in a certain form or under given circumstances. It should be noted that mundane folks tend to react poorly to non-avians with wings sprouting out of their backs.

Player Hints: Familiars and Weird Beasts

*Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we
sleep.*

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Assuming the role of an alien being presents a host of roleplaying challenges that go far beyond deciding which cool powers belong on your character sheet. Your character's perspective, language (verbal and otherwise), morsés, culture, attitude and perception will all be wildly different than those of a similar character raised on Earth. Even if an Otherworldly being has been raised among humans her whole life, the culture(s) that she has seen during that time will influence her view of these earthbound mortals.

There are, theoretically, an endless variety of Realms in the Otherworlds. While the Middle Umbral worlds constitute thirteen Realms by most reckonings, the spaces between them are vast and nameless. The confusing Higher Realms (which meld into the Dream Realms with annoying frequency) number in the dozens, and no one has ventured far in the Deadlands and returned with much to say. While most authorities claim that there are no more than 39 Horizon Realms, no one seriously believes that, and no way exists to catalogue them all. The sourcebooks *Umbra: the Velvet Shadow*, *The Book of Chantries*, *Verbena*, *Progenitors*, *Sons of Ether* and *Digital Web* all have hints or descriptions of suitable Realms of origin.

Players who wish to create characters from the Otherworlds should decide what kind of a world they came from, how they got there, how they left, what abilities they have (and why they have them), what culture (or lack thereof) they grew up with and what goal they have here on Earth. With a solid grounding for whatever being you choose to create, approach your Storyteller, give him a description of the place and try to work it into your chronicle's cosmology. For the sake of cooperation, try to avoid silly or inappropriate origins for your companion.

The trials of an alien being trying to make heads, tails or both out of the Gothic-Punk world can be touching, frustrating, tragic or hilarious, depending on how you approach it. Ideally, it should be a little of each. Whatever path you choose, make sure that your character has some firm grounding, substance and dimension. Portraying an innocent(?) abroad can be much more rewarding than doing a Mork from Ork schtick.

An Odd Bond: Familiars

Familiars and their mages have a unique bond, far different from that found in other mage-custos relations. Although many custos are friendly, even intimate, with their mages, there is seldom any true confusion over who holds the power in the relationship — except in the case of familiars. Mages generally feel that they have chosen their familiars, but familiars are just as likely to believe that they are the responsible party, taking charge of the welfare of their hand-picked sorcerer. Thus, the master/follower relationship is often solely a matter of perspective.

Nevertheless, the bond between mage and familiar is powerful, complex and utterly individual. No two mage-familiar relationships are the same, and both parties guard this bond with great ferocity. In the rare instances when a familiar goes rogue, it is often devastating, if not fatal, for his former mage. Familiar-less mages often point to this as a good reason to refrain from any dealings with such alien beings. (For more information on the mage-familiar bond see *The Book of Shadows*.)

Storytellers and players alike may note that familiar characters in Ascension's Right Hand are not simply assigned a certain power level based on their mage's Familiar Background. Here, the familiar is assumed to be the primary character with her mage being of secondary importance. Thus, the familiar is not limited by the mage's point expenditure. Players and Storytellers should, however, feel free to use the dot-based Familiar Background should they so choose. In that case, simply follow the power and creation guidelines outlined in *The Book of Shadows*, using the additional Advantages presented here to flesh out the familiar and her more unusual abilities. Although this mage-based system does not provide quite as much variation in powers and abilities from familiar to familiar, it is perfectly adequate.

Beginning Play

Players courageous enough to attempt playing a familiar or other alien being (and Storytellers brave enough to let them!) should plot their preludes around the circumstances which brought that being to Earth. The Books of Shadows and Chantries have plenty of background information about the circumstances which might lead to such a journey. A player and her Storyteller ought to decide what the character's past history was, then structure the traveler's introduction to humanity from there. The sample character, Valgreh the Incamani, offers one such prelude in his history.

Familiars have their own special "origins." Pages 125-128 of *The Book of Shadows* present the beginnings of the bond in detail. Whether the mage is a player character or not, his compact, discovery and relationship with a familiar should be run for all they're worth.

Building a Familiar

Regardless of their peculiarities, all familiars have the Special Advantages Information Font, Paradox Nullification and Symbiotic Knowledge and the Thaumivore Flaw. Depending on the power of the mage they "serve," familiar characters may start with either 15 or 21 "freebie" points. Coupled with the required Flaw, this gives them 20-26 points to begin with. This is a fair amount, and players should avoid abusing it.

A familiar's powers are determined both by the peculiar nature of the spirit and the physical body which the spirit inhabits. More powerful familiars have a greater variety and depth of powers, while relatively weak familiars may only be able to do one or two unusual things. Such a character may, if the Storyteller allows, purchase a Hedge Magic Path or two. Psychic Phenomena are rare, but possible. True Faith is inappropriate for familiars. The many things they have seen undermines the single-minded devotion True Faith denotes.

Disputed Origins:

Fragments, Wayfaers and Bygones

So what have they seen? What can a familiar recall about her Otherworldly past? Even if mages remain in the dark about the origins of familiars, the companions themselves know the truth, don't they?

Well, sort of. The passing of a familiar spirit into the material world leaves them with a sort of mystick amnesia. While they remember glimpses of past lives and fathomless worlds, the concrete memories of an earthbound familiar are hazy at best. The exact nature and clarity of these flashbacks are left to the player's considerable imagination, but some theories about such spirits' nativity offer some roleplaying hints.

Theories abound about the fate of mythic beasts and mages lost or broken by intense Quiet or Paradox storms. Many sorcerers speculate that their companions began life as material creatures somewhere, either in the Deep Umbra or on Earth itself before the encroachment of settled paradigms. While there is no way to prove either claim, the few hints that familiars have let slip indicate some truth behind both ideas. Perhaps, as the Celestial Chorus believes, such spirits are merely pure fragments of the One, undiluted by repeated lifetimes.

Whatever the case may be, familiars have traveled the spirit Realms over incalculable amounts of time, absorbing great wisdom and a multitude of facts. Spirits who undertake such journeys (willingly or not) are known as "Wayfaers," "Tehloon" to some Dreamspeakers. The vast information the Wayfaers consume jumbles together over time, becoming a whirling current of images, names, sensations and possibilities. Like the imperfect recall of people passed from incarnation to incarnation, this tor-

rent proves unsortable, even by the familiars themselves. Still, it offers an abundance of insight to those who can puzzle out their companions' riddles and lore.

"Bygone" is the general Tradition name for a mythic spirit that once had solid form but abandoned it for an ephemeral existence when some crisis threatened it with extinction. Some say that the beasts that roamed the Earth during the Mythic Ages passed into the Umbra to avoid reality's stranglehold. Others claim that they willingly forsook their physical forms for the spirit, while still another theory speculates that they never existed in solid bodies at all, but wandered as dreams of both humanity and the creatures that predated us.

Whatever the answer to this riddle may be, it is generally thought that Tehloon began their spirit lives as Bygones too restless to remain in even the Near Umbral Realms. Somehow, they crossed over the Horizon and into the Deep Umbra through channels mages cannot fathom (though they would love to discover them!). The things such traveling spirits remember from those quests are generally left to the player's imagination and the Storyteller's discretion, but should remain hazy in the minds of earthbound familiars. When such vagabonds leave their earthly form (through death or abandonment), it is thought they recall all that they had forgotten. The truth is an enigma.

Mythic Beasts

The mythic ones who still exist in their original forms in Horizon Realms, Umbral places (usually the Middle Worlds) and hidden spots on Earth usually require a refreshment of the essence that spawned them (mystick energy, i.e. Quintessence). Spirit beings usually need a material body to inhabit on this side of the Gauntlet if they lack the potency to form their own. Many Horizon Realms, however, contain mythic beasts in their original(?) forms. The Hollow Earth, the four secret Seasonal Realms of the Verbena, Doissetep's Shade Realm and the Second World of the Diné are only a few of the places a living creature from mythology might find refuge.

Some odd creatures evolve whole cloth in the Otherworlds, either through genetic or magickal tinkering, natural selection, ambient energies, mysterious visitations or the resonance effect (see *The Book of Chanties*). These unique species rarely leave their home Realms. Players who wish to run such beings should take the nature of their home Realm into account when designing their characters. Examples of more conventional Bygones can be found in Chapter Three of *The Book of Madness*.



Chapter Five: Numina

*Magicians can do more by means of faith
Than physicians by the truth.
— Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts**



Hedge Magic, Psychic Ability and True Faith

Some un-Awakened humans have Special Advantages, collectively called Numina. These include Hedge Magic, True Faith and Psychic Phenomena. Such abilities can be seen as a function of a partially-Awakened Avatar which has determined a small part of its potential, or one which has Awakened to its full, but limited, capacity.

Numina are static abilities. They exist in a very limited form within the momentum of reality and do not rearrange that flow in the way True Magick does. They seldom generate Paradox, but require a lot of time, effort or both. Despite their limitations, these mysterious powers offer a glimpse of the mystick that most mortals never receive.

Mages maintain that even other supernatural creatures use forms of Numina — the magical abilities of the vampire, werewolf, ghost, spirit, demon, etc. These beings, they point out, have limitations on the scope of their powers, limitations imposed by millennia of belief or their own pre-shaped Avatars. True Mages claim to be the only ones whose perceptions and abilities allow them access to the Spheres... but then, mages are an arrogant lot.

Consors and familiars are most likely to have these Advantages. Un-Awakened acolytes and other custos will have the more mundane Backgrounds instead. The following powers are meant for custos who are somewhat aware and adept. Naturally, the Storyteller gets the final say about which Advantages a character may or may not possess.

Only the rarest of custos have access to multiple Numina. Due to the constant work and training required to maintain these skills, as well as the necessary natural aptitude, most companions possess only one of the Numina types listed below.

Game Costs and Effects

Magic will always give you what you want—but not what you think you want.

— Donald Tyson, *Ritual Magic*

There are three different Affinities of Numina — True Faith, Hedge Magic and Psychic Phenomena. Hedge Magic is further divided into specialized Paths, and psychic abilities into different Phenomena. In system terms, there is no real difference between Psychic Phenomena and Hedge Magic, although their in-game applications are quite different. True Faith is another thing altogether. Advancement is earned, not purchased, and Faith's effects are largely the Storyteller's option.

Numina Affinities cost seven character points for the initial dot and double that (14 points) for each additional starting Affinity. If, for instance, you wanted to begin the game with both Herbalism and Telepathy, it would cost you 21 points. Obviously, specialization is helpful when learning the mystic arts.

Paths within the Hedge Magic Affinity cost only seven points each to begin, and each new dot includes one Ritual of that Path level. These Rituals, which allow a magician some latitude within her art, cost three "freebie" points to purchase and three times the level of the Path to buy with experience. A level three Ritual would then cost nine points, while a first level one would only take three experience points to purchase.

Psychic Phenomena are harder to diversify. The first Phenomenon costs seven points, but any additional ones require 14 points to buy initially. Each dot after the original one costs only seven points. It's easier to get the hang of a new ability after breaking through to find it. There are no Psychic Rituals.

Each Numina Affinity (except True Faith) costs its previous level $\times 7$ to increase after character creation and requires an Attribute + Ability roll to perform (the types of rolls vary with the Path or Phenomena). Many also require some time and effort. This is largely a roleplaying thing, although Storytellers can assume that Hedge Magic Effects take at least one turn per level to set up and use. Numina-blessed individuals are not True Mages, remember, but talented mundanes who have discovered a way of reaching further than most.

Numina also require some kind of focus, ritual or concentration to work. This can be anything from a drawn-out rite involving rune-carving and chanting to a trance or all-out concentration. This focus will vary from character to character (an Aboriginal shaman won't use the same process as a California psychic), but is essential. Whatever the focus may be, it must be performed the same way every time, or it won't work. Numina are not easily tossed off; they require work, skill and time.

Using Hedge Magic among the uninitiated is tricky. While dramatic Paradox backlashes are rare (though not unknown!), most overt spells simply fail when observed by skeptics (see "Unbelief" in Chapter Two of *The Book of Madness* for a possible reason for this). This often results in a would-be wizard with egg on his face unless there is some sort of "suspension of belief" thing going on — a ceremony, stage show, etc. The difficulty of working around the "magic is impossible" paradigm could be reflected in complete failure, additional difficulties to spells cast in public or additional Attribute + Ability rolls (Manipulation + High Ritual, Charisma + Expression, etc.) which might be needed to convince an audience that such magic was possible. Psychic ability is easier to use because popular culture accepts its existence, but levitating a couch is going to be more than most people can accept.

These abilities are not gained easily, and diversification is rare. One seldom finds a psychic magician with enough True Faith to stop a charging vampire. People usually discover one talent and focus their efforts on that one thing. Learning new Numina ranges from difficult to near-impossible; mentors must be found, ancient texts perused, and long hours of study invested. Even then, a given character may not have the talent to use both Psychic Phenomena and Hedge Magic. Psychics tend to extend the power of their minds while hedge magicians learn new forms of magic.

These rules may, at the Storyteller's discretion, supersede the Numina system given in the *Vampire* supplement *The Hunters Hunted*. (For the record, the Hedge Magic called "Thaumaturgy" in that book is now considered a "survival kit" Path of related spells referred to as Hunter's Craft.)

Systems

Hedge Magic and Psychic Phenomena require study, ceremony and concentration. The methods will vary from art to art and place to place, but the mechanics for each Affinity are essentially the same:

- The level of the Path (or Phenomena) determines what the magician can do (*Cursing* is the exception to this).
- In the case of Hedge Magic, some sort of ceremony must be performed or some focus must be used. Rituals can take one turn per level of the magic (or even longer) and might require extended successes. Some Paths cost a point of Willpower each time a Ritual is used.
- Psychic Phenomena are not instant powers. Users must concentrate upon whatever they are doing for the duration of the Effect. A focus may be necessary.
- An Attribute + Ability (usually Intelligence + Occult for magic and Intelligence + Alertness for ESP) should be made. Failure means the magician has to begin again, with +1 to her difficulty for each additional try.



- Hedge Magic's usual difficulty is the Path's level + 4. Psychic Phenomena go against a difficulty of 8 or the target's Willpower, depending on the Effect.

- The amount of successes needed to achieve certain Hedge Magic Effects depends on the circumstances. Under normal conditions, only one success is necessary to work an easy Effect. More strenuous spells, such as lengthy Healings or difficult Enchantments, require one success per Path level before they work. Really hard tasks, like throwing up a Ward against a pissed-off vampire, demand an additional penalty. The difficulty is raised by 2 for such labors, up to a maximum of 10.

- Willpower can be spent to grant an automatic success. Quintessence, however, might as well not even exist. Magicians and psychics cannot use it in any way, though they may be able to detect it (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 9).

- If a hedge wizard or psychic truly Awakens, she may no longer use her Numina; the character points are converted back into "freebie" points (on a one-for-one basis) and can be used to purchase Arete and Spheres *after a long training period*. (see *Mage*, pg. 102 for costs). All of these must be purchased from the beginning; such characters do not have initial dots in either Arete or Spheres, or any Avatar Background points, for that matter. All True Magick abilities must be bought from ground zero.

Awakening has no effect on True Faith, except perhaps to raise questions in the person's mind about her beliefs.

A quick reference chart of abilities, costs and rolls can be found in Chapter Four.

Rituals

The dots describing Hedge Magic Effects define the general abilities of the art. Rituals within those Paths allow the magician a wider latitude with her actions. Such Rituals must be purchased separately (see above) and are bound to the level of Effect. A magician must attain a level in her Path in order to buy the corresponding Rituals which allow her to expand its possibilities.

The particulars of the Rituals themselves are theoretically limitless. There are thousands of styles of magic in the world and no system could hope to replicate the tremendous variations between them. For rules purposes, use the Ritual suggestions mentioned at each level of the Paths to define the magic's game Effect. Narrate the story aspect of the spell as you see fit. A player *may* design her own Rituals if she can justify the research in story terms. However, her Storyteller should make sure that the power of the Ritual does not exceed the general Effects of the character's Path rating.

Although the particulars will vary from style to style, these Rituals require a bit of time to perform and often utilize special objects, like sacred stones, runes, holy water, magic paper, inscribed circles, medicine bags and burnt offerings. Generally, the more powerful the magic, the more complex the Ritual must be.

Teamwork

Some forms of Hedge Magic demand that practitioners pool their resources. Most forms of Psychic Phenomena are more potent if a number of talented people work together. To do so, the characters must share a common Path or Phenomena (Herbalism, Telepathy, etc.). A telepath cannot aid an herbalist in her labors—he doesn't understand the nature of what his associate is doing.

When two or more characters with related Numina combine their efforts, one prime person makes the roll. Each helper rolls his or her Attribute + Ability as well; an additional turn may be required for each helper to join in. For

each successful assistant, lower the difficulty of the prime character's roll by 1 to a minimum difficulty of 3. This isn't helpful for short, easy tasks, but can be vital when trying to pull off something really difficult, like levitating a safe or Binding a mad vampire, which might require extended rolls.

Teamwork failure usually leaves the prime character where she started, with no help or hindrance. Anyone who botches, however, adds + 2 to the prime caster's difficulty or subtracts her successes if more than one is needed. If the task involved some sort of heavy power (a level 5 Effect, for instance), an unpleasant side-effect might be forthcoming...

Hedge Magic



A full moonbow shimmered overhead as Grady laid the circle and poured pure water into a large glass bowl. Breathing deeply and evenly, he swished a white cloth in the water and raised it to his face. The cold water stung his bare skin where it fell, but the sensation cleared his head as he chanted in a low, melodic murmur. Setting aside the cloth, he gave his thanks to the God, took up a candle, and stepped into the circle.

Have mercy upon me, O God.

Blot out my transgressions,
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquities,
And cleanse me from my sins.
Purge me, and I shall be clean.
Wash me, and I shall be white as snow.
Create in me a clean heart,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Thou, who art the Crown,
And the Kingdom,
The Power,
And the Glory,
And the everlasting Law,
Amen.

Wind rustled the bare branches above him, flickering the candle and chilling wet skin. As Grady raised his arms to the haloed moon, the power stirred within him, cascading outward from center to fingertips. An ecstatic smile transformed him from mortal to magician, and his voice grew deep and husky as he spoke the spell of Summoning. The winter whispers soon answered his demand.

The wind, and one other: "What wouldest thou have of me?"

Some talented individuals can learn a very limited form of magic. Plenty of folks believe that these practitioners are mages, including many of the magicians themselves. Though their arts can transcend the apparent limitations of technological truth, hedge wizards are a far cry from True Mages. Nevertheless, even limited craft has great potential.

Hedge wizardry is often taught by mentors who remember the secrets that lent power to commoners during the Mythic Ages. Although shadows of Awakened possibility, the rituals, spells and minor talismans of Hedge Magic are still a step above sitting in front of the TV and slothing off. Students of mystery often learn a Hedge Magic Path to sharpen their spirits and grant them some say in their destiny. A good number go on to learn many types of magic, but some simply focus their energies to become, in their opinions, great magicians in their chosen art.

Some custos enter service to learn the magical arts. Such acolytes may learn a certain amount of occult knowledge from their mages, but the latter may become frustrated with pupils unable to progress past "book" magic. True Mages have gone beyond mere hedge wizardry; they cannot use it and cannot teach it. Their wisdom may inspire a prospective hedge magician in his endeavors, and their libraries may supply the necessary lore, but the magician herself must learn a Path, and a mage must first Awaken to reach the Spheres. True Magick cannot be taught; it can only be understood.

It is possible for a hedge magician to Awaken, but the more powerful she becomes in her static magic, the further from real Awakening she wanders. Such a character must begin again from scratch if she does Awaken, though her Knowledges, Talents and Skills remain intact. Her Path of magic will probably influence the Spheres she chooses, but everything she knows is, if not wrong, then at least mistaken.

There are a variety of Hedge Magic Paths, each with a particular emphasis and structure. Their names are given for convenience only; a Persian fravashi is unlikely to refer to her spirit magic as "Ephemera." Each Path lists its general description, Effects, limitations, system roll and the rituals necessary to do certain things. If you wish to design alternate Paths or Rituals, use the descriptions below as a guide. Remember, however, that hurling fireballs around is not conducive to the overall atmosphere of the World of Darkness. Hedge Magic is slow, difficult, low-key and inextricably tied to a given style of magic.

Magic Styles

Magic, even Hedge Magic, is an art, not a series of combat maneuvers. To the mage or magician, the beliefs that guide magic are more vital than the effects of the magic itself. The form these beliefs take shapes the caster's style and the rites that open the channels in the self, allowing the magician to defy mundane reality.

The bottom line with any form of magic in the World of Darkness is that intent shapes reality. Mages and magicians throughout the ages have disputed *whose* intent shapes *how much* of reality, but they generally agree that intent is the prime magical component. Thus, the magical practices of Chinese geomancers, Wiccan herbalists and Hindu fakirs are equally valid if the people themselves truly know what they're doing. Although many True Mages realize that foci are merely a means to an end, most un-Awakened practitioners swear by the art they study. Thus, the ceremonies they perform will be guided by the style of magic they pursue.

Styles are not just special effects. Although they do not have an impact on game systems, the style a character practices colors his whole life. Players and Storytellers should define their characters' magic styles and keep them in mind when magic comes into play.



There is, in *The Book of Madness*, a whole series of Paths called Dark Sorcery. This Numina is an unusually powerful one, but requires mortgaging your soul to Infernal beings. It's not a pretty sight. Normal hedge wizardry is less potent and harder to learn, but it leaves its practitioners free to control their own destiny without outside... debts.

The Paths Conjuration

With this Path, a magician may move pre-prepared objects from one place to another. Rabbits can be pulled out of hats, coins moved around, and swords summoned to one's hand. Mages who have studied the art declare that such feats are limited applications of Correspondence principles, but claim that the magicians lack the understanding or might to truly access the Sphere itself.

Any object moved must be prepared in advance by some method of the caster's belief. If the conjurer is a *voudoun* mambo, she must make sacrifices to the loa, sprinkle the objects with blood, ash, bone dust or blessed earth, and consecrate them. If he is a stage magician, he could hypnotize his assistant before he saws her in half. A Satanist may dedicate his machete to Lucifer while a Wiccan witch might inscribe the item, call the corners and invoke the Goddess and God (see "Styles"). In any case, the prepared object can be quickly called with an appropriate ritual. A coin cannot be Conjured using a Ritual designed to bring forth a Coke can. The magician's expertise determines the maximum distance. Failure means the Conjuration did not work, while a botch makes it go spectacularly wrong.

Conjuration is difficult to use offensively. The item moved cannot be chosen at whim. It may be an animal (rabbit, cat, mouse, or even human), it but may not be whisked in and out without prior ritual preparation. Unconscious beings may, with proper preparation (like hypnosis), be moved against their will by a powerful conjurer, but this Path *cannot* be used against an enemy in combat.

A conjurer can nudge or summon one additional object for every level above that required to move it in the first place, assuming he has the Ritual to do it. A magician with a Ritual to shift coins could move one at level one, two at level two, three at three and so on. Multiple objects cannot be Conjured at the basic level; thus, the greatest of conjurers could only move one human being with this art.

Other Rituals allow the magician to manipulate an object without moving it, like making a coin spin in midair or a rope grow taut and hang from nothing. Different Rituals must be learned for each kind of object and each different application. Levitating a knife, nudging it and picking it out of thin air all require separate Rituals, although any kind of knife will do if it has been prepared. A coin, however, cannot be used in place of the knife; it requires another set of Rituals. Once the subject is readied, it can be called with a simple command ("O Blade of my Father, I summon thee!"). The item itself does not become magical in any way, and once the magic is used, it must be re-set. Only one object can be Conjured at a time.

With a bit of style and a good Dexterity + Subterfuge roll, a conjurer can fool even the most sophisticated audiences into thinking that his magic is merely a good trick or hide the Conjured item until it's needed. This is difficult, though not impossible, with larger (or living) subjects. Just ask David Copperfield!

Roll: Dexterity + Occult **No Willpower cost**

Effects

- Wow! Caster can nudge a tiny nonfunctional object (a coin, a knife, a business card) without touching it. The magic carries no real force behind it. Anyone who wants to stop the item from moving can simply pick it up. Range is roughly 10 feet or less.

- At this level of expertise, the caster may move a small simple item (a book, a jar, rope) or Conjure it across intervening space, from up to 15 feet away. Anyone wishing to stop an object moved with this level of magic should make a Strength roll, difficulty 5.

- A large or complex inanimate object (a sword, a telephone, a boom box, a bottle of wine) or a simple lifeform (snail, ant, roach) can be moved, levitated or snatched from thin air. This object can be no larger than a chair and must be within 25 feet of the magician. An item moved at this level can support about 200 pounds, and those attempting to stop it must roll Strength against difficulty 7.



•••• Where'd that rabbit come from? At this level, the caster can move, levitate or summon a living mammal, reptile or bird, any complex lifeform of less than half human mass. Each kind of animal requires a different Ritual. Inanimate objects as large as steamer trunks can also be moved or levitated at this level. Maximum range is 50 feet or less.

•••• Presto! The caster can move or manipulate a human or human-sized animal from up to 60 feet away. This subject *must* be either willing or unconscious. It's best to work with a longtime partner when performing this "trick," as the experience is disorienting and distressing. Botching this Conjunction roll can have disastrous consequences. At best, the magic will simply fail. At worst, well... ick.

Rituals: This Path allows a magician to levitate, push, or summon a given subject. He could even briefly (two turns or so) separate it into parts and rejoin it, so long as he has the proper Ritual. Each different type of object moved requires its own Ritual, as does each application.

Cursing

One of the oldest forms of magic, a Curse imparts some bad wish onto an offending party. This ranges from the Evil Eye to a group malediction. Though anybody can direct ill will at someone, this Path allows a hedge magician to vent his spleen with real effect. At its most basic level, such a curse quickly fouls up its victim's life then dissipates. At its worst, potent Cursing can last for generations.

The severity of the Curse is usually bound to the dots in the character's Severity rating (the dots in his Path), and the effects usually only happen once. With a number of successes, however, he can make nasty things happen to more than one person in a given group. A magician cannot Curse someone more severely than his skill will allow (i.e. above the dots he has) if working alone. If he works with a group versed in the same Path, however, his anger carries more clout.

The basic system for Cursing is simple. The magician decides what he wants to inflict (within his ability), spends one turn per level of Severity magically collecting and focusing his hate, then discharges it in some cathartic fashion (a scream, a dance, a venomous e-mail message, etc.). His player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation to work the Effect and spends a point of Willpower. His successes get divided between Relation and Severity (player's choice), allowing a player to custom-tailor his Curse. The Curse's Effect occurs soon afterward, at some point and in some way determined by the Storyteller, not the magician; he may choose who he effects, but not how.

If, for example, Justice the Shadow-Chosen (with three dots in Curse) rolls four successes when Cursing his landlord, he could choose to inflict a serious injury on him

or cause embarrassment to both the landlord and his wife. Two days later, the landlord trips and falls, breaking his leg (Severity 3). If Justice had decided to humiliate the family instead, the fall might have ended in a pile of dog feces; the wife, meanwhile, burns the brownies for her first PTA meeting (Severity 2). Simple, but effective!

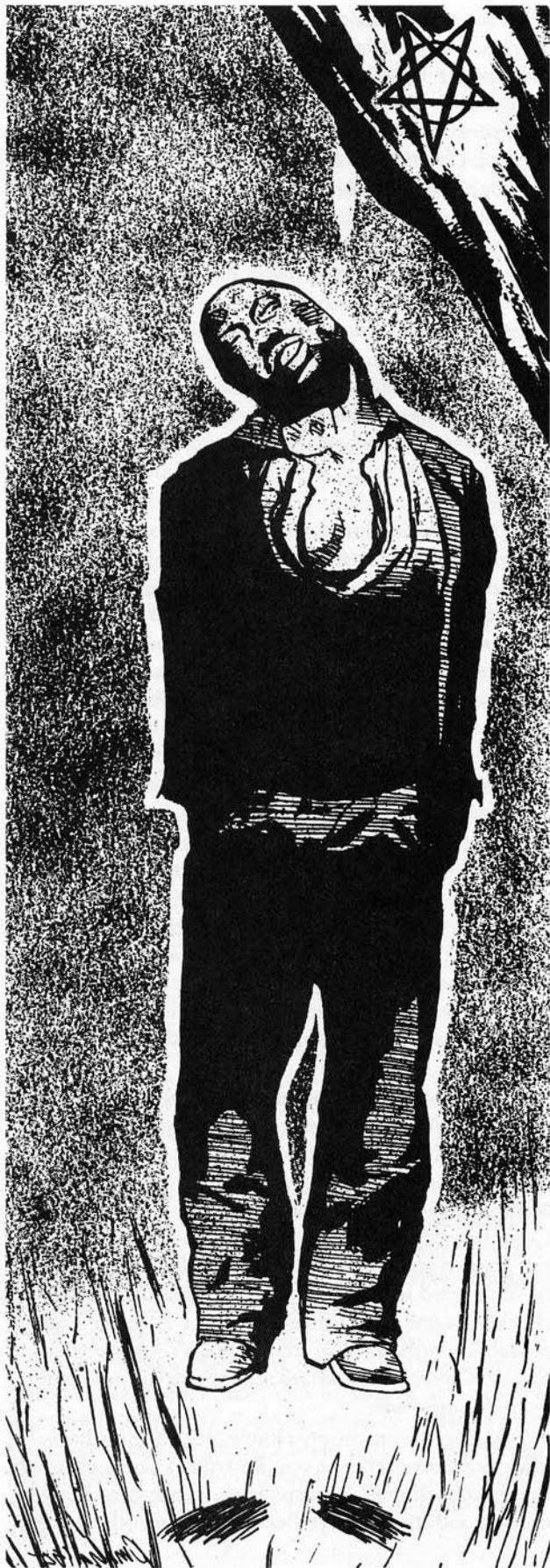
Unlike most forms of Hedge Magic, Cursing can focus the will of a group into a force more potent than a single magician could muster. By acting in concert (see "Teamwork," above), an angry pack of Curse-skilled hedge witches can bring down death and worse upon their enemies. In such cases, each additional member grants a new dot to the pool, adding to either Severity, Relation or both. Justice, therefore, could use up to four levels of Severity if he teamed up with Cheryl of the Five Rose Sect to curse the landlord, and his difficulty drops by 1. In the case of group Curses, set the initial difficulty at 8 for simplicity.

Curses do not force events to happen or rearrange the laws of nature (that is the province of True Magick). They do, however, subtly nudge things or people already in motion towards the caster's intent. A hedge wizard's Curse may take days or even months to occur, but it *will* happen. Someone successfully Cursed may not immediately walk through a plate glass window, but she may find herself under a falling windowpane the next time she passes a construction site. In magickal terms, such events are always coincidental and will only strike when a strong possibility exists for them to.

An especially skilled magician may invoke the Death Curse. By spending all her permanent Willpower, the player can add that Willpower to her Curse dots, and divide the total as she sees fit between Severity and Relation. The character then turns into a mindless husk and dies soon after, burned out by inner hatred. A witch with minimal skill in Cursing might only get four or five dots to spend, but a powerful one could wither a whole family!

Supernatural creatures may be Cursed, but they can resist the Effect with a successful Willpower roll. This roll's difficulty will usually be 7 or 8, but might go as high as 9 if the magician was especially powerful or successful. Naturally, the being in question has to be aware of the Curse in order to resist it. Short problems will probably just happen and be done with, but prolonged Curses can be discovered with a little work (consulting the spirits, checking auras with Prime magick or Auspex, reading probability with Entropy, etc.). A mage's Arcane can take successes away from a wizard attempting to Curse her on a one-for-one basis.

As any wise practitioner knows, rearranging the paths of fortune can backfire on you. Botching a Curse will bring the effect back upon the caster in ways that should delight the most sadistic of Storytellers. Even if the roll is success-



100 Ascension's Right Hand

ful, there will always be some kind of fallout from a Curse, especially a severe one. The nature of this payback lies more with storytelling than with systems, but should be in line with the general power of the Curse and the ill will of the magician. Backripples range from dropping an expensive item (and having to pay for it) to foreclosure, physical ailments or sudden disappearing acts on the parts of one's friends.

No Curse need be used at full potency. The caster may choose to revoke the Curse at any time prior to its effect. A magician skilled in this Path can also try to undo another's Curse with a Wits + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 9) and a Willpower point.

Roll: Manipulation + Intimidation Costs 1 Willpower
Severity Effect (Path rating)

- A brief inconvenience (dropping an object, saying something stupid, closing a door on your fingers, etc.)
- A slip-up which results in lasting injury or embarrassment (stepping on glass barefooted, throwing up on the Japanese Prime Minister, breaking an heirloom, etc.)
- A serious injury or illness, not incapacitating, but painful and inconvenient (broken limb, hernia, gunshot wound, etc.)
- A lasting illness, not fatal, but debilitating (infection, stroke, heart attack, Alzheimer's disease, etc.)
- Death, usually by some ghastly means (decapitation, impaling, mangling, torture, disease, etc.)

Relation

- One person only
- One close relation or friend
- Two similar relations (male heirs, lovers, parents)
- All close living relations or friends
- All relations *and* friends!

6+ Relatives or friends for generations to come

Rituals: Although the practices involved in Cursing vary tremendously, the system Effects are pretty consistent. There are no special Rituals for this Path.

Enchantment

Enchantment is the magical art of creating minor talismans (as opposed to the more powerful True Magick Talismans). Crafting magic from ingredients both eldritch and mundane, the enchanter spends much of his time closeted in a laboratory peering through foul smoke, containing minor explosions, and tracking down bizarre magical ingredients.

Minor talismans differ from their magickal counterparts in many ways. Each has a single power, which usually operates a few times under set circumstances. Even the strongest such talismans pale in comparison to those crafted with True Magick. Their Effects aren't flashy, but they do get results... usually. Although they carry a trace residue of magic (detectable with the Prime Sphere), they

show up less readily than Talismans with a capital "T." Most reflect their homemade origins. Crafting a talisman, even a minor one, calls for a certain degree of mundane craftsmanship, which some enchanters have and some... well...

Talisman creation should flow more from story concerns and good roleplaying than from die rolls. For those who want a system, assume that each different minor talisman requires a Ritual process which must be mastered before the craftwork begins. When the Ritual is purchased, the enchanter sets to work on the object itself. After the talisman's form is crafted (which may require a few Dexterity + Ability rolls), the talisman should be prepared in some special way according to the belief or style of the magician—carved with runes, inset with crystals, dipped in blood, blessed by the son of a priest, etc. Useful Abilities for these tasks include Crafts, Artistic Expression, Gunsmithing, Hunting, Traps, Alchemy, Herbalism, Poisons, Stone Lore and Hearth Wisdom, depending on the purpose and manufacture of the talisman.

After this, the enchanter sets *one* purpose for the item. This is the power it will have. Successful enchantment usually demands a day or two of preparation per talisman level. A simple level one item would require only two to four days of work, while a fifth-level one would demand at least five. At the end of this time, the enchanter makes an Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty is talisman's level + 4). A point of Willpower spent during final creation infuses his might into the talisman.

An enchanter can never create a talisman more powerful than his Path level. If he has four dots in Enchantment, he can only craft talismans of four dots or less in power. Once created, a minor talisman will work within some specified framework, i.e., when the moon is waning, when a blind man coughs, when the blade is drawn in anger, etc. These conditions should be colorful and very specific, tied to the purpose of the enchanter, not to general utility. Such particulars should be described during the creation process and must be adhered to. Each minor talisman will only work a certain number of times (usually based on the number of successes rolled) and will be useless, if decorative, thereafter.

Minor talismans vary tremendously, from the rowan necklace that protects against faerie magic to bones that allow one to (hopefully!) speak to one's ancestors. Such talismans can be used by anyone. Some potential talismans appear below, but clever enchanters can create their own with a little ingenuity and a lot of work. First, the player must decide what single Effect the talisman contains. She then details her character's research and development process. A simple "I create a level five talisman that makes me invisible" will not suffice! Both player and Storyteller should check the prospective talisman to make sure that it fits the general guidelines offered



below. After a period of story-defined time (anywhere from a few days to a year or more), the player attempts an Intelligence + Occult roll, difficulty 9. Success means the enchanter has discovered the secret of enchantment and can proceed as described above.

Botching a creation roll can be a bad thing. Many an enchanter has disappeared in a sudden conflagration caused by something as prosaic as an untimely sneeze or a misread passage in his alchemical notes. Obviously, talisman creation is not a quick and easy art!

Roll: Intelligence + Occult Costs 1 Willpower
Effects and Sample Talismans

- A small object with tight restrictions and a limited power, perhaps a brief addition to an Attribute or Ability, that is never obvious as magic.

- A silver toe ring which protects its wearer from incoming projectiles if she is barefooted at the time (two dots of Dodge vs. missiles).

- A colored candle that grants the user some one-time favor after it is burned (two points of Resources, Arcane, Allies or Influence, depending on the color of the candle). The Background works once to provide a favor, then fades. Each success creates one candle.

- A handful of grave dust that enables the user to sleep soundly. He will wake immediately if someone approaches him with hostile intent.

- An oak picture frame that preserves any painting or document placed in it for as long as the frame remains intact. Both frame and contents must be sealed with almond oil and sprinkled with pure water.

- A more potent version of a level one talisman (with an additional die or two of effect), or one that alters reality more noticeably.

- A handful of bullets (one per success) that do two additional dice of damage when fired from a specially-prepared gun.

- An iron nail which enables the user to cause someone to painfully stub his toe. The nail must be driven by an enemy into a footprint left by the target.

- A golden charm that alerts the wearer when the talisman maker (or some other single party) is in danger. The charm must be sprinkled with wine each time it is used and works once for each crafting success.

- A rowan ring which negates any form of fae magic (called Glamour) used to bewitch the wearer. This works for one incident per crafting success.

- The item performs some obviously unusual function. Witnesses who know anything about magic will sense it being done. Clueless folks will be confused; how did he do that?

- A salve which heals three non-aggravated Health Levels worth of open wounds in a matter of minutes. This must be applied by moonlight by one who loves the wounded. Each success creates one application of balm.

- An obsidian bull torque which strengthens the wearer once after it is blooded (three points of Strength that last for one scene per success after blood is wiped across it).

- A handkerchief which wipes away any normal thing it is used to clean (blood, ink, spilled food, fingerprints). The user must hum softly while mopping up. This works once for every success rolled during creation.

- With a talisman of this caliber, the user can defy a fair amount of conventional reality, albeit with some restrictions. If these limits are ignored, the magic is ineffective.

- Bones which allow the user to contact the person they came from. Note that this is not always successful! If it is, however, the user can ask one question per creation success. Whether or not the ghost answers accurately is the spirit's prerogative, but it will answer if it can. These bones work only three times, then crumble to dust.

- A book which translates anything written in it into the reader's native language. This book must be sprinkled with paper ash before the magic works. The translation effect works once per creation success, then reverts to the original language set down.

- A knife which stabs directly for the heart when used. This inflicts Strength + 5 dice of damage and can be thrown. The blade must first be drawn in hot anger and washed afterward in fresh blood. Works once per success.

- Items this potent are rare and unpredictable. They often fail in places where the technological paradigm is strong. Nevertheless, they work some wonder that obviously defies the seeming order of things.

- A black cloak that masks the user's footsteps, even if he walks across a squeaky floor. While this magic is active, the wearer will be effectively silent unless he speaks aloud. Silver threads must be sewn into this garment; they break and fall away after the magic expires.

- An exquisite piano which plays beautifully for anyone who strokes its keys, even if she knows nothing about music. A prayer to the nine Muses (by name!) must be recited before the piano will play.

- A brass amulet which protects the bearer from detection and observation by magickal means. This amulet of the mists obscures its bearer from the flow of magickal energies (adds +4 to the difficulty of any roll made to locate the wearer magickally). The user must first answer an enigma before the amulet will protect him. This veil lasts a number of weeks equal to the creator's successes.



Omaha '95

Ephemera

This Path allows a medium to reach into the Velvet Shadow and contact spirits. These ephemeral ones may dwell in either the Low or Middle Realms. Those few who pass into the High Realms after death cannot be reached (save by the most talented of mediums). Sadly, few mortals know the differences between the Three Worlds (or acknowledge the existence of spirits at all, for that matter!). A medium can only try her best and see what happens.

The nature of the spirits contacted depends upon the Rituals the medium knows. One group of rites allows contact with natural spirits, while others breach the barrier between the living world and the Shadowlands. Note that even the medium herself might not realize which spirits she deals with; at least two dots of Spirit Lore or Enigmas are required to know the difference. Amateur mediums frequently get themselves in trouble this way, opening themselves to Bane corrupters or Gaffling pranksters (see Chapter Five of *The Book of Madness*). The early steps of this Path are dangerous but unavoidable.

Mediums open themselves up as spirit channels. Those spirits, however, have minds of their own. If they have some reason to mislead, possess or abuse the magician,

they may try. In *Wraith* terms, a medium offers herself up as a temporary Consort for the Puppetry Arcanos so long both are in contact. A spirit with the Possession Charm (see *Werewolf*, Chapter Seven or *The Book of Madness'* Appendix) lowers its difficulty by 2 if attempting to take over a medium. In story terms, this means the ghost or spirit can act through the medium with little hindrance.

Thankfully, these magicians have some defensive Rituals to help them out if the spirits are unruly. Wise mediums are versed in the practices of Warding and Forbiddance (*Wraith*, pgs. 234-235). Each of these counts as a level one Ritual and has the following system effects:

- Warding protects an area from ghostly intrusion. By using some precautionary charm (an intricate chant, a prayer, painted sigils, iron nails, sprinkled salt, smudging with incense), spending a point of Willpower, and rolling same vs. difficulty 7, the medium can block wraiths from entering an area for one week per success.

- Forbiddance immediately drives a wraith from an area. By rolling successfully (magician's Willpower vs. difficulty 7), the medium can push a ghost from her immediate area. A willful wraith can oppose this Ritual by spending one of its own Willpower per success, but must otherwise flee until the medium has left.

Nature spirits are more direct, if more problematic, to deal with. With the Banishment and Seal Rituals (level two), the medium may attempt to Forbid, Ward or, with Dolor (level three), actually harm a natural spirit. This last inflicts the medium's Willpower as damage against a spirit's own Power with a successful Wits + Enigmas roll. She totals up her Willpower and successes and takes a figurative chunk out of the spirit with them. A strong spirit will be unimpressed, but a weaker one may be wounded or even destroyed if the medium is good enough. Despite these Rituals, throwing one's weight around is not a safe proposition, as the spirits often fight back. Mediums tend to have high Willpower scores!

Persuasion is often more effective than force. To establish contact, the medium rolls her Charisma + Enigmas while calling out to the spirits in the area. A number of helpers (see "Teamwork") can help lower the initial difficulty, as can a Fetter or Haunt if the medium hopes to reach a ghost. Locating her quarry usually requires an extended roll (see below). Once some communication begins, the magician states her case, hoping to win over the spirit to whatever purpose she might have. The details of this interaction play out like any normal conversation, but ought to be a hell of a lot weirder. The uncanny nature of this Path should be obvious.

Many among the dead cannot be reached by mortal entreaties. Those who can may be called with an extended roll of as many successes as the Storyteller sees fit. Contacting your brother in the city where he died last year would demand less work than finding a Colombian bishop killed in the 1970s. The Storyteller should decide whether or not the ghost has passed beyond mortal reach, though the truth should remain a secret from the players. An ill-intentioned spirit might masquerade as the ghost the medium wanted to meet, and this could cause all kinds of fun.

Unlike other Paths, the difficulty of reaching across the barrier goes down with each level, while your ability increases. A medium with one dot in Ephemera works against difficulty 9 and cannot actually communicate with anything other than human ghosts (and then only if they wish to be spoken to). This goes down by one step per dot, to a final difficulty of 5, but cannot go lower than 3. As a medium's skill grows, she can speak with natural spirits, see into the Penumbra (but not pass through) and seek out specific entities.

A number of Traits are especially appropriate to medium characters. Enigmas and Spirit Lore are essentially required (although the latter cannot be bought during creation — it must be learned the hard way). Occult, Subterfuge, Awareness, Cosmology and Intimidation are very helpful. The Merit/Flaw Spirit Magnet is common, as are the Haunted, Guardian Angel and Spirit Mentor permutations. Characters with the Shapeshifter Kinfolk or Medium Merits reduce all Ephemera difficulties by 1. Spirits, it should be known, make good allies — and terrible enemies! Behave.

Roll: Charisma + Enigmas

No Willpower cost
(except for Rituals above)

Effects

- You can feel the spirits moving and even get their attention with a successful roll. What they do is up to them. This is a dangerous but necessary phase in a medium's Path.

- You can make distinctions between the spirits you summon and can call specific ones if you know how. If things get out of hand, you can try to dismiss what you have called.

- • When you speak, something always comes. With luck, you can address it, befriend it, or dismiss it. If you want to personally address a particular spirit, you can try at this level.

- • • You can pierce the veil between worlds and actually see and hear those ephemera around you. Most spirits respect you for your insight and ability. Some will even come when you *don't* call...

- • • • The spirits of nature and the dead know your name and often come when you call. You can hurt those who displease you and dismiss those who offend you.

Rituals:

Level One: Open to the Unknown (free Ritual), Call Ghost, Ward, Forbiddence

Level Two: See Ghost, Call Naturae, See Naturae, Seal, Banishment

Level Three: Gossip (allows the medium to "spread the word" around her chosen contacts), Dolor

Level Four: Grasp (medium becomes a Fetter for a chosen wraith for seven days), Command (medium can order a minor nature spirit to do one task and expect to be obeyed), Deny the Veil (allows medium to see into the Penumbra; actually two separate Rituals, as one grants a view of the Shadowlands and the other a look into the nature spirit world)

Level Five: Distant Call (Medium can attempt to speak briefly to one who has passed on to some afterlife or punishment. This works within Storyteller's discretion)

Healing

This Path allows a magician to quell pain or even heal small injuries or illnesses. Such Healing is not a miracle cure-all. It takes a long time to treat an illness or injury and longer still for the patient to fully heal. Even the simplest magics, though, can ease pain for as long as the healer keeps his hands on the ailment, and the risk of infection drops greatly when he is working on a wound.

Healing magicians usually need some form of Medicine Knowledge, though that Ability need not be Western medicine (in fact, it's usually more effective when it's not). Meditation, needles, chanting, massage, herbs and foul-smelling brews are common foci. This Path also saps a certain amount of energy out of the magician during the process, and it's easy to burn out by healing too much too

quickly. Magical healers often have a strong sense of duty and compassion, and the traumas of the World of Darkness often use up such people long before their time.

This Path cannot heal aggravated wounds.

Roll: Manipulation + Intuition Costs 1 Willpower per ailment

Effects

- You can soothe a headache, backache or other minor pain. The ailment doesn't go away, but your patient feels better for a while.

- Sprains, migraine headaches, flu, minor infections — you can speed the healing process by 50% or more with a little work.

- A cure for the common cold! Broken bones and nasty wounds heal twice as fast as they normally would and without infection. You can help an Incapacitated character to her feet and get her moving, though you cannot heal the injuries completely.

- Chronic diseases (asthma, arthritis, diabetes, etc.) are not beyond your care, although healing them will take hours or weeks. Broken bones and severe trauma will heal 50% faster than normal, and your touch banishes all but the worst pain.

- With effort, you can cure deadly conditions (AIDS, cancer, meningitis, stroke), though it takes a lot out of you and requires weeks of treatment. When these diseases go, they're gone for good. Broken bones and major trauma heal in one to three weeks of care, and infection poses no risk as long as you're on the job.

Rituals: Open wounds, area trauma (including broken bones, sprains and dislocations), diseases, chronic aches and infections each require a different Ritual to heal. These each cost only three points across the board. The specifications of such rites depend on the healer's outlook on injury and disease. Some believe that medicine is simply a matter of contacting (or driving out) the right spirits, while others insist that internal energy must be guided around an obstruction. Healers should decide ahead of time what their magic philosophy is.

Herbalism/Brewing

This elemental Path allows a wise person to brew natural ingredients into potions, salves, oils, incense, poultices, stews and powders with real potency. It requires the Herbalism Knowledge to perform and usually involves dozens of harvested materials — plants, mosses, grains, molds, earth and sometimes bodily fluids or remains, depending on the herbalist's practices.

Many herbalists believe that the magic they work comes through an affinity with the innate power of living things. Most dispute the concept of will-driven magic, arguing that all things have powerful properties (or inner spirits), essences which must be respected. Herbal magic is not simple enchantment — it is a relationship between the wise one and the Earth.

Like the Enchantment Path (above), magical Herbalism demands a certain investment of time, effort and material. Only the right ingredients will do! The basic system for herbal magics is the same as Enchantment, but the concoctions take longer to prepare. Each level of Effect takes two to four days of harvesting, sorting, mixing and aging before the results can be achieved. This time can be reduced by a well-stocked pantry or ready garden, but will almost never drop below one day per level. These things take time, dearie!

Herbal concoctions are usually good for a single use and a single purpose. The potency of the broth, salve or brew depends on the herbalist's successes (Intelligence + Herbalism). A single success indicates a bitter batch that is only marginally effective, while four or more indicate an especially enticing bit of work with double potency and a pleasing form. Victims of the darker variety of Herbalism should be allowed to resist the Effect by rolling their Stamina (or Willpower) against the herbalist's successes.

Because of the slow and subtle nature of herbal and brewing magics, their exact Effects are better left to stories than to systems. Players are encouraged to devise their own recipes (Rituals), with the samples below as guidelines. The discovery of some new brew might be a subplot of a whole story as the consor seeks the perfect materials to concoct a love potion or experiments with the flora of some new Realm.

Roll: Intelligence + Herbalism No Willpower cost

Effects

- Enables the herbalist to concoct poultices and brews which cure minor aches or rashes, induce or prevent sleep, alleviate symptoms of slight illnesses, preserve foods when they would otherwise spoil, and other minor Effects that would never be considered magic.

- At this level, an herbalist's creations quickly cure minor illnesses and pains, avert or confer pregnancy with 100% certainty, radically alter a person's mood, discourage or attract animals or insects, induce or cure intoxication with a few sips, and other noticeable effects that, while not apparently magical, seem remarkable.

- These potent concoctions can put people to sleep with a pinch, reduce the effects of deadly poisons and serious illnesses, speed recovery of open wounds and broken bones by 50% or more, put folks into light trances or randy moods, and perform other obviously unusual functions with amazing speed.

- Brews and items created with this level of Herbalism can accomplish some obviously unearthly things — adding one or two dots to a Physical or Social Trait for a scene, clearing up an infection in a few minutes, aid recovery from life-threatening illnesses and such. Obviously, these effects are subject to both accepted local reality and Storyteller judgment; they are not sudden, flashy or long-lasting.

- These are the magic brews of legend — sleeping potions, love oils, deadly poisons, healing salves, instant cures, all-night aphrodisiacs, flying ointments and other

impossible (or at least improbable) solutions. Such potions, if they work, allow the imbibers to defy conventional reality for a scene or two. Like Curses, the reality such concoctions displace is open to interpretation. Did this person really fly, or did she just think she did? Did the apple kill her, or was there strychnine in the apple? Players should not merely drink some potion and turn into swans — the effects of the mightiest herbal arts remain subtle and subjective.

Summoning, Binding and Warding

I caught her on Mount Helicon... She was bathing in a spring, and I caught her and bound her with moly — sorcerer's garlic, as it's sometimes called — and with certain rituals. The hardest part was getting her back to England.

— Erasmus Fry, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*

The most dangerous sort of Hedge Magic. Summoning Path Rituals draw forth creatures — from rats or birds to vampires or werewolves — guard against them, or press them into service. It is a complicated Path, loaded with precautions and Rituals, and even under the best of circumstances, it creates lifelong enemies.

As with any other form of Hedge Magic, there are multitudes of Summoning styles, from simple pagan appeals to the creatures of the Goddess to elaborate medieval rituals, Aboriginal soul-snarlings and modern black magic compulsions. Few are designed with politeness in mind. Most order some being to appear, bind him magically when he does, and keep him at arm's length until he does what you want him to. The style of magic and outlook of the magician will have plenty to do with the Summoned creature's disposition — and its desire for revenge.

Most such Rituals require long preparations. Few wizards would be foolish enough to compel anything, especially something powerful, to appear without first making sure their asses were covered. These protections require Rituals, a separate one for each different kind of being. After these Wards are laid, the Summoning begins. This too requires a specific Ritual; one cannot Ward against a dog, then Summon a vampire. Finally, when the one called does arrive, a Binding may be laid to force some kind of service. A Minor Binding merely requires one task be performed before the Binding dissipates. A Major Binding compels servitude until some condition is met and usually creates an eternal grudge. No one, not even an animal, likes being forced into service.

Some magicians prefer to use only Wards or Summonings to protect themselves or to call upon aid. Only a fool would dare to lay a Binding without protection, although some have tried. Dismissal Rituals offer the magician some sort of compromise. If the rite is successful, the Summoned being will leave in peace — for the moment, at least. The forms these Rituals take can range from dancing around a consecrated mound to human sacrifice, bended-knee prayers or intricate circles which take days to engrave. Players and Storytellers should play such ceremonies to the dramatic hilt

(see the fiction opener for this section). The bare-bones systems for such actions might work as follows:

- **Warding:** The magician lays some sort of Ward (a pentacle, a triangle of salt, an offering of food and good liquor, gold, herbs, a plate of wolfsbane and blood, etc.) and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty is the Path's level + 4). The target of the Ward will have to spend one Willpower per the magician's success to enter the area protected. A Ward lasts for one scene per success. A fair but devious Storyteller might make the Ward roll herself, leaving the magician to wonder whether or not his Ward will hold!

This Ritual will act as countermagick (one die per success) or reduce any incoming Gift or Discipline by one dot of effect for every one of the wizard's successes. Wards do not, however, restrict gunfire.

- **Summoning:** After a long series of recitations, entreaties and preparations, the wizard rolls his Charisma + Occult with the usual difficulty. He must accumulate twice as many successes as his target's (permanent) Willpower rating with one roll per hour. The range of the compulsion is one mile per level of the Path rating used, i.e. a Path level three Summoning has a reach of three miles. Once this is done, the first such being within the area of enchantment will be compelled to go to the wizard as rapidly as possible.

This magic does not instantly conjure a creature out of thin air. The Summoned one will come at her own speed. If there isn't a suitable being in range, the wizard may have to continue until he finds one. For each Willpower point spent, he may add another mile to the range. This is a dangerous tactic, because if it works...

- **Minor Binding:** Once the subject is present, the magician can try to compel her to service — if he dares! A Minor Binding pits the wizard's will against his subject's, using the Immutable Laws of What Is. True Mages claim that such a contest is a reflection of Avatar against Avatar... with perhaps a bit of outside help from other concerned parties.

To affect a Minor Binding, the wizard spends a Willpower point and performs his Ritual (Manipulation + Occult). His target rolls her own Willpower (difficulty of the wizard's own). If she wins, the Binding has no effect. If she loses, she must perform one task for him before she is freed. This should be spelled out in as complete a form as possible. Rest assured that any Bound being will be looking for the way out.

- **Major Binding:** The system for a Major Binding is the same as a Minor one, except that both parties extend their rolls to amass 10 successes. For each roll, each party spends a Willpower point; whoever reaches 10 first (and still has Willpower left over) wins. If the Summoned one loses, she is bound to the wizard until some condition is met. This "contract" must be specified at once and can be anything from "Until my hair goes gray" to "Until Haley's Comet next approaches Earth," so long as it is a possible event (Conceptions of "possible" can get pretty fluid, however!).

If the wizard loses, he is toast.

- **Dismissal:** If the wizard wants his subject to depart in peace, he performs another Ritual (involving some sort of thanks, a benediction and a request to depart, usually with a healthy bribe attached). A simple Wits + Occult roll with normal difficulty "persuades" the Summoned one to leave without ripping the wizard a new asshole. This does not prevent later animosities, but for now, the being will leave content. This will not work after a Major Binding has been attempted.

Hedge Magic Summonings work only on material beings. Ephemera (above) handles spirit-dealings, and the Dark Sorcery Path of Summoning (in *The Book of Madness*) describes the command of elemental beings and demons. Vampires, werecreatures, mages and those of fae blood can counterattack with their own magical abilities unless a Ward or some other outside force prevents them from acting. This Path is best performed with allies standing by to help.

The Rituals above need not be performed together. Bindings or Wardings can be used on their own if the circumstances permit. Players and Storytellers should be flexible, dramatic and fair when running such Summonings. This magic Path could stimulate either suspenseful storytelling or intense debate.

Rolls: Wits + Occult (Warding)	No cost
Charisma + Occult (Summoning)	No cost
Manipulation + Occult (Binding)	Costs 1 Willpower
Wits + Occult (Dismissal)	No cost

Effects

- This level's Rituals affect only small animals — rats, bats, birds, lizards, etc. The wizard may Summon three of these per success.

- The higher mammals (chimps, dolphins, cats, dogs, wolves, apes) may be Summoned and controlled at this Path level. A magician may control two of these per success.

- Normal humans can be Summoned at this level. A wizard attempting this should use some artifact of the individual he wants to command (a hair, an item of clothing, etc.) in his Rituals for them to work. Only one can be commanded per success.

- Minor supernatural beings (ghouls, Kinfolk, other consorts or familiars, formori, etc.) can be brought forward and Warded. The limitations of normal humans apply.

- Major supernatural beings (vampires, werecreatures, mages, faeries, and some types of earth-bound monsters) can be Summoned and Bound with these Rituals. Only one individual can be so treated, and some bit of fur, blood, armor, clothing, etc. must be used. This is really dangerous territory; one blown roll and...

Rituals: Each different kind of subject, whether bird, wolf, or vampire, has a unique set of Rituals which must be purchased and used to have any effect. Warding, Summoning, Minor Binding, Major Binding and Dismissal all require separate Rituals as well.



Psychic Phenomena



It was always foul.

Slip into the thoughts of the best person who ever lived, even Saint Thomas Aquinas, for instance, just to pick an absolutely terrific person you'd think had a mind so clean you could eat off it (to paraphrase my mother), and when you come out — take my word for it — you'd want to take a long, intense shower in Lysol.

— Harlan Ellison, *Mefisto in Onyx*

Disciples of the Mind regard psychics with pity and slight disdain. After all, they settle for such a small taste of the possibilities of the unchained mind. How could they be so blind? But the un-Awakened psychics, who reach beyond their physical limitations, know their talent for what it is — a backstage pass to the show in progress.

Psychic Phenomena are a mixed blessing. Unlike hedge magicians, psychics rarely seek out their abilities. They come naturally, unexpectedly, shaking that person's world and forcing them to either hide their gift or suffer hell for it. In their earliest stages, Psychic Phenomena are inconvenient at best and terrifying at worst. Strange, sudden insights and frightening spasms of power push some psychics into insanity. Those who have fully, spontaneously Awakened might relate with the lot of the kid who just discovered his ESP. Such an epiphany might leave you feeling like a hero and a freak at once.

With practice, the psychic can refine her talents into the sixth senses they were originally intended to be. By opening her mind to its possibilities, she has more in common with the True Mage than he would like to admit.

Phenomena

It's a rare psychic who shares more than one Phenomena. For the most part, these mental adepts have a single natural aptitude which can be trained but hardly diversified. There are no Paths for Psychic Phenomena, only the aptitudes themselves. With practice and luck, however, a consor with mental talent can delve further into the world around her than many more self-absorbed magicians.

All Psychic Phenomena below cost one point of Willpower to use.

Clairvoyance

Clairvoyance is the ability to extend the senses far beyond their normal range and to see or hear things that are happening in other places. This power normally requires some focus, such as someone or something that the psychic knows is present at the area to be observed.

Psychic characters must roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8) to project the senses. When projecting, the psychic can no longer see what is happening around her body, nor may she effect events that she witnesses. The psychic is merely an observer.

Roll: Perception + Alertness Costs 1 Willpower
Effect

• The psychic sees events in a hazy, dreamlike manner in any room in the building that he is in. These visions are easily misunderstood.

•• The clairvoyant can see events anywhere in a fifty mile radius and sometimes hear them as well (3 successes), although the sounds are distorted.

••• The psychic can see and hear events anywhere within a 250 mile radius and even touch objects (3 successes), although they feel vague and amorphous.

•••• The clairvoyant can now see, hear and touch anything within a 2,000 mile radius.

••••• The master psychic who has reached this level can use all five senses on any object anywhere in the world.

Telekinesis

Telekinesis allows the character to project her will and move objects with the power of thought. A roll of Wits + Athletics (difficulty 8) is required to use this power. If the psychic botches the roll, objects begin to fly randomly about. To first pick up an object, it must be within view. You need not see that item while holding it.

Roll: Wits + Athletics Costs 1 Willpower
Effects

• The psychic can levitate small objects with great difficulty. Physical gestures make this somewhat easier (e.g., throwing, lifting, etc.). If these are not possible, the difficulty rises by 1.

•• The telekenetic can affect small objects, such as bending a spoon or levitating a glass of water. Again, without gestures, the difficulty rises by 1.

••• At this degree of proficiency, the psychic can handle an object in the next room and throw it around. Gesturing sharply in that direction helps. However, the psychic may only lift objects that require *half* his Intelligence (determined as if Intelligence replaced Strength) to lift.

•••• The telekenetic can lift items that require his full Intelligence and no longer needs to gesture. He can pick up any item within a 200 foot radius and can pick up more than one object by concentrating.

••••• The psychic who has reached this level can lift anything in sight which his Intelligence + 2 can handle. He can manipulate as many items as he has points of Dexterity.

Telepathy

This ability allows a psychic to read minds. The telepath must roll Intelligence + Intuition against the target's Willpower to read its mind. The being whose thoughts are being read is unaware of the psychic's presence unless he botches the roll.

As the quote at the beginning of this section shows, this talent is not always the most pleasant of Phenomena. Both player and Storyteller should make the most of the degradation and disgust this talent can evoke in a psychic. The darkest secrets in the World of Darkness can get *really* unpleasant.

Roll: Intellegence + Intuition **Costs** 1 Willpower
Effects

- The psychic can feel the current emotions and sense the mood of one target within view.
- The telepath can read the surface thoughts of one target within view, receiving whatever they are thinking about at that moment.

••• At this level, it is possible to read the target's recent memories and plans for the near future. The target must still be in sight.

•••• The psychic can read the target's deep thoughts and plans for the distant future. The amount of information received varies at the Storyteller's discretion, based on the number of successes. He can read the minds of people in other nearby rooms, but requires descriptions of them to "get a lock-on."

••••• This master telepath may now read multiple minds at once and discover the deepest secrets of people (even things that they have repressed). He can read the mind of someone across the world, so long as he can see them or their image, or even read the minds of those using psychic powers elsewhere in the world.



Those people from whom I have freed myself are the ones who become attracted by the body and repelled by the spirit, and who know naught of Love and Beauty. The only mediator between them and God is God's pity for their ignorance of the law of God. I cannot judge, for I was one of them, but I sympathize with all my heart.

— Kahlil Gibran, *Spirits Rebellious*

The details of this Numina can be found in Book One of **The Book of Shadows**, as well as **Vampire: The Masquerade** and **The Hunters Hunted**. Briefly, this Affinity allows a companion to turn aside vampires or hostile magicks through his belief in an outside power, in some God or gods beyond human will.

The exact origin of this power is open to debate. Some mages claim that it conclusively proves the existence of the One, while others consider it the ultimate expression of suppressed Awakening — the innate Avatar held back yet focused by what its incarnation *wants* so badly to believe. Whatever the "real" reason behind the Numina may be, its power against the undead is legendary. For this reason alone, consors with True Faith are treasured by mages who cross swords with the Kindred on a regular basis.

The blade of the Faithful, however, is double-edged. Besides the steadfast convictions of those who hold the Light (convictions that often turn to fanaticism if conflicts arise), there is the dulling effect True Faith has on True Magick, almost as if both were opposing forces — or the same force, albeit in a different form. The line between a Faithful companion and a witch-hunter is a pretty thin one.

In game terms, True Faith allows the companion to use one die of countermagick for every dot of Faith he has. Vampires must make a Willpower roll to even approach one with True Faith. The human character's rating is the difficulty of the roll. To progress in Faith, however, the character must follow the tenets of his chosen belief without fail. Faltering jeopardizes further gains, and continual doubt can erase the Numina completely.

Each dot of True Faith costs seven "freebie" points. Only roleplaying can reflect this Numina's vagaries. After character creation, the rating cannot be increased by spending experience, only by living it.



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Chapter Six: Who's Who

*Welcome to my little world
Completely self-contained, yeah
We'd like to eat up all your sins
And soak up, soak up,
Soak up lots of pain, yeah
— Oingo Boingo, "Pain"*



The following custos examples range from normal human servants to weird Umbrial beasties. Some serve Tradition masters, while others work with Technocrats or more extreme factions. The different custos types are explained in detail in Chapter One.

Storytellers may employ these ready-to-use consorts as inspiration, templates or non-player characters. We recommend that Storytellers using these characters in their game alter them somewhat (even if means just changing their names) to foil well-read players.

The motivations for an allied character are pretty important; they will determine the strength (or weakness) of that custos' devotion to the mage and her associates. Always remember that custos are individuals, not mere cannon-fodder. While many acolytes will throw themselves into harm's way if necessary, there must be some compelling reason — love, fanaticism, desperation, etc. — for them to do so. The custos below have solid reasons for what they do, which can lead a story into all kinds of complications. Never forget, or underestimate, the role of acolytes in your chronicle. They can become the hinge of some great conflict or hold a story's resolution in their un-Awakened hands.

Servants (Low-level Acolytes)

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

— Psalm 44

"Annie" (Rebecca Goldman)

Nature: Traditionalist

Demeanor: Caregiver

Residence: Hollytimber

Affiliation: Marauder

Type: Acolyte (spear-carrier)

Concept: English maid, circa 1940

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Expression 3, Intuition 1, Streetwise 1, Style 1

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Firearms 1, Melee 1, Research 1, Service (tea serving, table serving, etc.) 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Art History 3, Enigmas 1, Investigate 1, Linguistics (French, Hebrew) 2

Willpower: 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Mentor 1, Resources 2

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: Acute Senses (+ 1), Ambidextrous (+ 1), Amnesia (- 2)

Background: Rebecca Goldman was born in the Bronx and spent most of her life in New York. She always loved art and old things and was particularly fascinated by museums. She managed to wrangle her parents into taking her to every museum in New York and a few others as well, learning all she could about what sorts of exhibits they scheduled and the care of priceless antiques and artwork. Alternately mocked and admired by her peers for her absorption in art, Rebecca turned ever more to the museum for companionship. She began painting and did well enough in school to win a scholarship to college, where she studied art history with an eye toward becoming a museum curator.

She failed to make any real friends in college and was always lonely and searching for something she could paint that would express her love for the old days and the idyllic lifestyle pre-World War II times seemed to offer. A certain longing and wistful desire infused her works, and she began to imagine herself in various roles among beautiful antiques and lovely gardens. Although she did not know it, Rebecca was slipping toward catatonia and actually had several episodes of "lost time" in which she simply sat while she imagined another world around herself.



When the Marauder known as "Mum" encountered her while believing she was visiting the museum with her long-dead son, their psychoses overlapped, and Rebecca became caught up in Mum's Quiet. Because Mum has a stronger mind and will than Rebecca, the young woman now finds herself cast in the role Mum has created for her, that of her serving maid Annie. Annie has no recollection of her former life as Rebecca.

Image: As Rebecca, she is an attractive jeans-clad girl with curly brown hair and a wistful, haunted look about her. She speaks with a pronounced New York accent. As Annie, which is the only personality she now recognizes, she is immaculately clad in a maid's uniform with a starched white apron. Her hair is bound back in a bun, and she speaks with a lower-class British accent.

Roleplaying Notes: Rebecca was somewhat shy and hesitant, making it difficult for her to make friends. She was passionately interested in art and museum work and never missed an important exhibit if she could help it. As Annie, she is much more outgoing, given to chattering on about nothing in particular in a cheerful and helpful manner. Her special "training" in various helpful fields has puzzled Annie (why does a maid need to know how to fight?), but she consents to it with good will. After all, Mum knows best.

Story Hints: Annie/Rebecca might be encountered either by accident through coming into contact with "Mum" or purposely if the characters have been sent to retrieve her for some reason.



Josh Snelling

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Conformist

Residence: Hightower Apartments (studio)

Affiliation: Technocracy (Syndicate)

Type: Acolyte

Concept: Computer operator

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Dodge 2, Intuition 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Research 2, Survival 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Computers 3, Computer Hacking 3, Enigmas 1, Finance 3, Investigate 2, Law 1, Linguistics (German) 1, Occult 1, Science 2

Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Resources 2

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: Computer Aptitude (+ 1), Allergic to alcohol (- 1)

Background: Josh Snelling always considered himself above average. In school, he was the one who threw off the curve on tests. Once when he brought home a B on his report card rather than straight As, his father beat him so badly he couldn't return to school for two weeks. Josh survived and vowed to himself that he'd never fail again. No matter what, he'd survive.

As soon as he was able to do so, he moved into his own apartment and began working at the Computer Shak. Things went well until his father put his mother in the hospital with a beating so bad it ruptured her lung. Sick of his father's violence, Josh decided to ruin him. Having learned his way around the Internet, he broke into his father's records at the bank, his credit card companies and even at his work. With a few strokes, he erased his father's finances and filed numerous unsatisfactory reports on his job performance. With a few more, he gave him several thousand dollars outstanding debt on each credit card. Needless to say, his father was ruined and is now in jail for tax evasion (which Josh also engineered).

All this clever manipulation did alert the Syndicate, however. They were looking for a few good recruits, and Josh signed on. Of course, they made him an offer he couldn't refuse — literally.

Josh is a frightened young man. He realizes that the Syndicate is a dangerous organization and he knows they wouldn't hesitate to ruin him and wipe him out just like he did to his father. He has begun teaching himself survival skills (along with dozens of manuals) in case he has to make a run for it. He has no idea he's dealing with mages. The Syndicate he fears is a looming confederation of dangerous mortals.

Image: Josh is an average-looking young man in his early 20s. Unlike many computer "nerds," Josh is in very good shape from working out, hiking, and going on wilderness survival trips. He keeps his brown hair reasonably short and wears suits to work to blend in with the other computer operators. At home he wears jeans. Though he tries to hide it, Josh always looks a little scared.

Roleplaying Notes: Josh lives in terror. He knows better than anyone what could happen to him if the Syndicate figured out he's not a loyal "company man." He fears the underworld and believes that should he ever reveal anything of what he knows about their operations, he'd be killed — or worse. He is racing against time to prepare himself to disappear into the back woods some night. He doesn't know you just can't hide well enough to throw off mages if they really want you.

Story Hints: Josh might come to players' attention when they stop his paroled father from murdering him. Glass Walkers (a tribe of urban werewolves) might have taken note of Josh and his situation. One of them might be a mage's consor and suggest that Josh might know some interesting information — if they can get him out of the Syndicate's clutches.



Body Count (Floyd Thomas)

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Bravo

Residence: The Proving Ground

Affiliation: Nephandi

Type: Acolyte (Dupe)

Concept: Psychotic Skinhead

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Melee 3, Security 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1, Torture 1

Knowledges: Finance 1, Law 1, Medicine 1, Occult 2

Willpower: 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Fame 1, Mentor 1

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: None

Background: Body Count was born in Detroit and given a name (Floyd) he doesn't want to remember. Brought up in one of Detroit's tougher neighborhoods, he was taught to hate "niggers and kikes and wops and all other un-American trash." He first killed when he was 10. A smaller boy refused to give up his lunch money to Floyd. Floyd beat the boy senseless, then held him underwater until he drowned. It gave him a sense of power and he wanted to do it again — soon.

By the time he was 12, Floyd had a gun and a gang (though some people on the block thought he was slow getting to it). He began shaving his head, shouting fascist slogans, and wearing basic black with jackboots and swastikas. He renamed himself Body Count.

His gang terrorized the neighborhood, and it wasn't long before he was contacted by Sigmund Groell. This new mentor captured Floyd's imagination with visions of a takeover of the whole city. This would be followed by the state and the nation as they gained more converts. Naturally, Groell explained, he would be happy to supply expert military training, weaponry and even a place to train and live among "the pure." Body Count took the bait. Now he and his gang have joined like-minded people from all over the country at the Proving Ground, several acres of fields and firing ranges set off from the surrounding area by electric fences and armed guards. They are training and awaiting their summons.

Image: Body Count is a big bruiser, standing 6'3" and weighing close to three hundred pounds. All of it is muscle. Arnold Schwarzenegger should be this muscled! Body Count has no body hair at all. He shaves his head and body daily and polishes his bald top to a high sheen.

Roleplaying Notes: Body Count is a killer. Though he can use cunning when necessary, his usual approach is a frontal assault. There is nothing subtle about him. Those he can intimidate can live if he isn't in a bad mood. Those who stand up to him die.

Story Hints: The characters might stumble upon the Proving Ground while Body Count is on guard or might meet him with a lot of his friends when Groell (a Nephandus) sends his troops to kidnap (or assassinate) a mage who has been interfering with his plans.

Sallow (John Bremmen)

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Deviant

Residence: Tamalin (an old RV)

Affiliation: Tradition (Dreamspeaker)

Type: Acolyte (Dreamer)

Concept: Whacked-out Seer

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Talents: Awareness 2, Expression 4, Intuition 5

Skills: Drive 1, Meditation 1, Sculpture 4, Technology 2

Knowledges: Cosmology 2, Electronics 3, Enigmas 2, Occult 1

Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Destiny 2, Dream 5

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: Nightmares (- 1), Strangeness (- 1), The Bard's Tongue (- 1).

Background: Born just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the early '70s, Sallow was once known as John Bremmen. Sallow's life was a slice of perfectly ordinary, small town, apple pie Americana until the year he turned 15. It was then that the dreams (and nightmares) began. Sallow's dreams were bizarre, Jungian affairs in which everything was a symbol for something else. Yet, they always came true. Due to the complexity and strangeness of the images, Sallow was hardly ever able to interpret the dreams until they actually came to pass.

If Sallow's prophetic dreams were all of happy or minor events, he might have learned to accept his inability to properly interpret them. Unfortunately, all too often, they predicted disaster. After he saw his best friend run over by a drunken driver (an event Sallow realized he had dreamed of for many nights), Sallow became obsessed with divining the meaning of his dreams. However, the harder he tried, the more obscure the dreams became. Only when the prophesied event occurred did the meaning become clear.

By the age of 19, Sallow had utterly withdrawn from the world around him. Refusing to go to college or hold a job, he spent most of his days and nights in bed alternatively trying to stay awake or to sleep for days (even weeks) on end. Although his parents brought Sallow to every type of medical specialist they could think of, no one could seem to help their child.

Then one day, a few years ago, Sallow made a small breakthrough on his own. He realized that staring into the fuzz on his TV screen after sign-off was incredibly soothing to him. Sallow soon learned to induce hypnosis using the white noise and fuzzy picture as a cue. Although he still couldn't interpret his dreams, he felt much more relaxed once he had stared at the screen for a few hours.

Last year, a Dreamspeaker mage known as Assentia discovered Sallow while on an Umbral journey. His aura drew her to the powerful, emotionally-scared youth. Offering her services as a counselor, Assentia slowly gained his confidence. She also discovered that Sallow would often mumble phrases aloud from his dreams and visions while staring at his TV screen. These phrases, although still somewhat obtuse, helped Assentia to partially interpret several of the visions.

After experiencing the power and truth of Sallow's visions, Assentia vowed to keep the young oracle with her and help him overcome the mental block that keeps Sallow from fully embracing his mystic abilities. Assentia and Sallow are now quite close, each protective of the other. They travel the country in Assentia's RV,



equipped with a large-screen TV (no satellite dish; the TV only receives static in most places). Although some Dreamspeakers frown upon any reliance on technological devices, Assentia believes true oracles cannot be judged.

Image: Sallow is a tall, lanky young man with tangled brown hair and slightly crossed brown eyes. He usually wears pajamas, preferring never to wear street clothes save when absolutely necessary. Sallow suffers from mild jaundice, the onset of which coincided with the first of his prophetic dreams. Despite his rumpled appearance, Sallow has a strangely compelling aura most accurately described as that of an ancient child.

Roleplaying Notes: Sallow rarely makes complete sense when he speaks, unless one listens very carefully or in just the right way. Assentia often interprets for him and will never let anyone else speak to him without being present herself. Sallow always appears as if he could slip off to sleep — or perhaps to another dimension — at any moment.

Story Hints: The seer's dreams could involve player characters. Other mages have heard of Sallow. Some covet him as a useful information font (perhaps kidnapping him, in which case Assentia will be desperate to rescue him), while others might point characters in need of an oracle to Sallow for aid. Sallow may be encountered anywhere, since Assentia always keeps them both on the move.

Acolytes

The Way means inducing the people to have the same aim as the leadership, so that they will share death and share life, without fear of danger.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Reynolds

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Perfectionist

Residence: Haven House

Affiliation: Tradition (Order of Hermes)

Type: Acolyte (aware)

Concept: English butler

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette (servant/master relationship) 4,

Firearms 1, Meditation 1, Melee 2, Research 1, Security 2,

Stealth 1

Knowledges: Enigmas 1, Finance 2, Investigate 2, Law 2, Linguistics (French, Italian) 2, Occult 2

Willpower: 5

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Mentor 2, Resources 3

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: Fast Learner (+ 3)

Background: Born to a middle class family in London, Terrence Reynolds always dreamed of one day living in a fine, big house and having lots of servants at his beck and call. He got his wish in a roundabout way. His mother wanted him to have chances his father never did, so she saved for years to pay for his elocution lessons and etiquette classes. Knowing that the key to his dream lay in leaving his accent behind him, Terrence cooperated. The job market didn't.

Terrence found himself in his early 20s with no real desire to work in any given field and few opportunities had he chosen to pursue them. Then he read an article about a school that trained butlers and gentlemen's gentlemen. The article indicated that many wealthy clients would pay handsomely for such services. Though it seemed a little outmoded to him, Terrence applied and was accepted. Feeling that a butler should be well versed in a number of areas, Reynolds went beyond the normal course and did several independent studies, particularly on servant etiquette.

His abilities and hard work did not go unrecognized. One of the sponsors of the school, Sir Rodney Haversham, was so impressed by Reynolds that he hired him as assistant butler to his own. When the older man retired, Reynolds took his place, was made privy to the master's secrets, and has ruled Haven House ever since. He lives in



a fine house and oversees a staff of over 30. Though the house lies within a Horizon Realm, he is a contented man.

Image: The quintessential English butler, Reynolds is in his 50s, but still keeps his trim, upright figure. His dark hair is graying, giving him a dignity to match his manner. Reynolds is never less than impeccably dressed.

Roleplaying Notes: Though he is very much satisfied with his position in life, Reynolds is bemused by Sir Rodney's views on other mages. He feels that the Traditions ought to cooperate more extensively with each other and the Orphans (though many of them are dreadfully dressed and lack any manners whatsoever). To that end, he is a member of the Crossovers.

Story Hints: The characters could interact with Reynolds in his role as a member of the Crossovers. If something happened to Sir Rodney, Reynolds might seek out the characters to assist him.

Dr. Shayna Reed

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Director

Residence: Raleigh, NC

Affiliation: Tradition (Euthanatos)

Type: Acolyte (Unaware)

Concept: Forensic Pathologist

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Intuition 3, Instruction 3, Scan 2

Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Research 4

Knowledges: Investigation 2, Law 3, Medicine 5, Poison 4, Science

Willpower: 4



Backgrounds: Allies 1, Influence 2, Resources 4.

Special Advantages: None.

Merits and Flaws: Compulsion (Perfection) (-1), Higher Purpose (+1)

Background: Dr. Shayna Reed is a brilliant forensic pathologist, a medical doctor with a law degree as well. From her origins as the oldest child in a poor family, Dr. Reed used her academic ability to accomplish great things. A graduate of Georgetown Law School and Georgetown Medical School, Dr. Reed specialized in forensic pathology — the science of interpreting the effects of trauma, disease and decay on the body.

Unconsciously driven by memories of her helplessness during her father's painful death from cancer, Dr. Reed has risen to become the Chief Medical Examiner for her state. She also lectures at local universities and seminars across the country and is a consultant for the Violent Crimes Task Force of the FBI.

It was in this role that she came to the attention of the Euthanatos. While Dr. Reed is completely unaware of the connection, and would find the very idea of magick absurd, she has occasionally benefited from the protection and assistance of Euthanatos agents during her career. In turn, the Tradition mages use her research, writing and certain individual cases to further their own studies of death and dying.

Image: Dr. Reed is an attractive, trim blonde in her mid-40s. She is very intense and can be intimidating when angry. While she is pleasant and polite, she often is preoccupied with her work to the detriment of personal relationships.

Roleplaying Notes: Dr. Reed is a very intelligent, very intense professional. She works hard and rarely relaxes, seeking to impose reason and order on a chaotic

world. She is driven both to enhance her own scientific expertise and to find the truth about the deaths of her "patients" and bring killers to justice. She often appears distant and a bit cold, but is actually a woman of great passion. She strives to keep herself and her emotions under rigid control at all times.

Story Hints: Players could encounter Dr. Reed in any number of ways if they are involved in a story dealing with a death. She is equally as formidable as either an ally or an adversary.

Cody

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Deviant

Residence: (Secret)

Affiliation: Tradition (Verbena)

Type: Acolyte (aware)

Concept: Bodyguard

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Intuition 2, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms (submachine gun) 5, Melee 3, Security 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Technology 2

Knowledges: Investigate 2, Law 1, Linguistics (Spanish) 1, Occult 2

Willpower: 7

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 2, Mentor 3, Status (mage/custos society) 2

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: Code of Honor (+1), True Love (+1)

Background: Originally from the east Tennessee mountains, Cody was a farm boy. He grew up next door to Ella Claire Monroe, the prettiest girl in the mountains. Ella Claire was rumored to be a witch, but Cody didn't care. He loved her heart and soul. He asked her out twice and was on the verge of asking her again when their lives changed radically.

While he was out hunting with his daddy's shotgun, he heard a scream. Rushing over to investigate, he found two strange men dressed in black forcing Ella Claire into a black car. He called out for them to stop, and one of them turned toward him, pulling a gun. Cody shot him first. Ella Claire broke away from the other one, and Cody blasted him too, but not before he himself was shot.

The next thing he knew he was looking up at Ella Claire. She had blood all over her arms — his blood — but he only felt a little pain, as if from a healing wound. Cody didn't understand everything that was going on, but he knew two things: they had to get out of there, and he was damned if he was going to lose her, witch or not.



Forty years later, he's now a professional bodyguard. He's never stopped loving Ella Claire, though he's never told her so.

Image: Cody is pushing 60, and his once-red hair has grown sparse and dulled to a reddish brown. He is still tall and muscular and moves as if he were far younger — the result of Ella Claire's magick, which has extended his lifespan. His face looks as though it was pasted together from wildly different sources, making it look a little like a scrunched-up freckled pig. The shadow from the brim of his hat hides most of his face. Most people don't notice what Cody looks like after a while in his presence and are sometimes startled when a stranger reacts to his looks. He wears a black leather duster under which he hides his ever-present submachine gun.

Roleplaying Notes: Cody is a down home, laid-back, lazy country boy — until he needs to take action. Then he's at the forefront, ready to respond to whatever threat there might be. He takes his job seriously and usually extends it to include guarding anyone who seems unable to guard themselves (children, expectant mothers, clueless idiots), often making himself a target by getting between them and danger. He's a friendly cuss, always willing to chew the fat. Someday that may prove his undoing as he often says a little too much when unfriendly ears might overhear.

Story Hints: The characters might interact with Cody in his capacity as a recruiter for the Crossovers or might suddenly be helped by Cody while embroiled in a dangerous firefight or magickal battle.

The Reverend Lonnie Ray Singer

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Fanatic

Residence: Church of Spiritual Renewal

Affiliation: Traditions (Celestial Chorus)

Type: Acolyte (aware)

Concept: Traveling evangelist

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 4, Expression 4, Intimidation 1, Streetwise 3

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Fast-talk 4, Firearms 1, Meditation 2

Knowledges: Computer 1, Enigmas 1, Finance 3, Law 1, Linguistics (Latin) 1, Occult 1, Theology 3

Willpower: 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Fame 1, Influence 2, Mentor 1

Special Advantages: None

Merits and Flaws: None

Background: Lonnie Ray Singer was born in Texas, and he was raised to get right with the Lord. Fundamentalist to the core, his parents dragged him to every tent revival and meeting from Georgia to California and back. Along the way, little Lonnie learned a little about religion, a goodly amount about finances, and a lot about showmanship.

By the time he was nine, Lonnie Ray was doing guest appearances at revivals, thumping his Bible and screaming out denunciations of the sinners. His parents pocketed the money and gave him candy, but what he really performed for was the adulation of the audience. He grew into a handsome young man with silky manners that wowed the ladies.



About that time, he received his first visit from a charismatic member of the Celestial Chorus who stayed up all night talking with the young preacher and questioning his beliefs and practices. After a night of examining his conscience, Lonnie Ray was shaken and deeply ashamed by his selfish acts. God, he realized, walked in the hearts of all faiths. He determined that night to change his ways and bring folks to the One through gentler means.

Lonnie Ray's powers of persuasion are quite sufficient to sway the hardest heart and to gentle the wildest maniac. He travels the tent circuit, bringing words of comfort and compassion to all who attend his meetings. In each town, he takes half the money he collects and gives it to local charities. When not moving on to the next town or preaching, Lonnie Ray can be found helping out at homeless shelters and soup kitchens or visiting people in hospitals and nursing homes. Many of those who have been the recipient of Lonnie Ray's kindness have joined his caravan and become part of the Celestial Chorus' network of good Samaritans.

Image: This handsome young man (early 30s) has blond good looks, a winning smile and a handshake and "Bless you" for just about everyone he meets or who attends his revival meetings. He wears inexpensive, well-tailored clothing.

Roleplaying Notes: When not in the pulpit, Lonnie Ray seems straightforward and level-headed and is obviously quite intelligent. He is generous to a fault and would literally give someone the shirt off his back. Once involved in his sermons, he's a mesmerizing speaker, almost compelling those in the audience to believe in the One. In his own quiet way, Lonnie Ray is as fanatical in his desire to save souls as are the more bombastic, hate-mongering evangelists who can't understand the appeal of his message of love and neighborly generosity.

Story Hints: The characters (or those they care about) might be singled out by Lonnie Ray as people who look like they could help him in some task (such as delivering 30 Thanksgiving baskets to the poor who live in the worst part of town) or they might come upon a fight in which Lonnie Ray is the victim. If they attack his attackers, he would be grateful for their assistance, but would try to dissuade them from seriously injuring those who might have killed him. This might develop into an interesting chronicle if they befriend Lonnie Ray and abide by his good advice.

Consors

*You and I, we reject these narrow attitudes
We add to each other like a coral reef
Building bridges on the ocean floor
Reaching for the alien shore
— Rush, "Alien Shore"*

Some of these powerful allies draw belong to other supernatural groups. Details about vampire clans, Gypsies, the Bastet werecats, or their game specific Traits (Blood Pool, Rage, etc.) can be found in the following books: *World of Darkness: Gypsies*, *The Werewolf Players Guide*, and *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.

Shard (Vampire)

Clan: Brujah
Sire: Mayday
Generation: 11
Blood Pool: 12
Nature: Deviant
Demeanor: Rebel
Residence: Haven (abandoned warehouse)
Affiliation: Orphans (Hollow Ones)
Type: Consor
Concept: Vampire (Brujah Anarch)
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 2
Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 1, Melee 2, Security 1, Stealth 3, Survival 2



Knowledges: Investigate 1, Linguistics (Greek), Occult 2, Politics 1

Willpower: 4

Humanity: 7

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Generation 2, Herd 2, Mentor 1

Special Advantages: Vampiric Disciplines — Celerity 1, Potence 2, Presence 1

Virtues: Conscience 3, Self Control 3, Courage 4

Background: Shard was born Sharilyn Polopolis twenty-one minutes before her fraternal twin sister Lorilyn. The sisters like to explain that they lived boring, little lives in a boring, little town where only boring, little things ever happened. Naturally, then, it attracted some attention when Lorilyn accidentally set the community center ablaze with her newly Awakened magickal powers.

The sisters were only 15 and already had acquired reputations as hellions. They ran away and made for the big city. Lorilyn changed her name to Lorelei, and Sharilyn changed hers to Shard. For a while they earned money as exotic dancers, but eventually Lorelei made contact with others like herself, Orphan mages who called themselves Hollow Ones. Shard followed along, but lacking powers of her own, felt that she didn't fit in very well.

Then she met Mayday. The handsome vampire recruited her into his gang and made her a ghoul (one who acquires strange abilities by drinking vampire blood). Dangerous as it was, her new life agreed with her. When she was critically injured in a shoot-out a few months later, Mayday Embraced her. After letting her get herself together and explaining a few things, he told her he was moving elsewhere. She didn't want to leave her sister and decided to stay behind and start her own gang. Meanwhile, she remained her sister's shadow, watching over her and trying to keep Lorelei (who thinks it's kind of cool that her sister's a vampire) from getting hurt.

Shard learned of the Crossovers and felt that she should be one of them, even though the Hollow Ones don't believe in Ascension much. Like any good gang member, she reasoned that there's safety in numbers. Besides, she doesn't mind having a special group of her own.

The consor has an acolyte of her own. Church was a runaway who met up with the wrong crowd. They left him for dead. Shard happened to be passing and Embraced the good-looking young man (since he was technically already dead). Now Shard is discovering the joys of raising her childe.

Image: Shard is an attractive young woman apparently in her very early 20s. She has short dark hair, icy blue eyes and a pallid complexion. Her black leather and lace garb fits the typical Hollow One fashion.

Roleplaying Notes: Shard has been different from everyone else (except Lorelei) for as long as she can remember. Now she's finally found people like herself. She enjoys the city and all its diversions, and has made it her business to know the people she needs to know to survive and guard her sister. She would kill (or die) to protect her twin. She pretends to be tougher and less sentimental than she actually is.

Story Hints: A typical late-generation vampire, Shard flits across the night scene like she was born to it. Although not a bad sort, Shard still drinks blood to survive. She might try to feed from a character or may be caught in the act by one. Wherever she may be, her Orphan mage sister will be close by.

Zorro (Zoe Rowell)

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Visionary

Residence: Crossovers

Type: Consor (aware)

Concept: Bartender

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Carousing 2, Diplomacy 2, Dodge 2, Intuition 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Etiquette (Bartending) 4, First Aid 2, Firearms 1, Research 1

Knowledges: Alchemy 3, Enigmas 2, Finance 1, Investigate 2, Linguistics (Spanish) 1, Medicine 1, Poisons 1

Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Influence 1, Resources 2

Special Advantages: Path of Herbalism/Brewing 3

Merits and Flaws: Albino (odd appearance) (-1)



Background: Zorro was born in Spain to a family of alchemists. As an albino, she was of great interest to her mother's friends, and she grew up while being tested and learning alchemy herself. She has always known that she would remain with the group (even if just on the fringes), though she herself lacks magickal abilities.

Tiring of the mages' attempts to Awaken her Avatar and impatient with their seeming superiority, Zorro came to America to meet and talk with other mages. She was bitterly disappointed to learn that they were so busy defending their own views of Ascension that they had no interest in working together. Believing that this might be the result of hubris getting in the way of common sense, Zorro appealed to their acolytes, consors and familiars and found herself being instrumental in founding the Crossovers. Between acting as a clearinghouse for Crossover information and running her bar, Zorro is too busy to miss being a part of a Chantry any more.

Image: Zorro is an albino in her late 20s, with short, spiky white hair. She prefers pale colors which she believes don't accentuate her pallor. Her eyes are pink. She took the name Zorro because it was close to her own name and because she wanted to acknowledge her Spanish upbringing while calling attention to her secret rebellion.

Roleplaying Notes: Zorro doesn't suffer fools gladly. She is intelligent and articulate and believes she is doing the best thing she can to help people fight the stranglehold of the Technocracy. She is friendly almost to a fault, but speaks passionately about any subject (like unity or stupidity) that strikes near her idealistic core.

Story Hints: This consor is a headstrong sort. Her arrogance often leads her into situations beyond her ability to handle. She could be taken hostage and the characters roped into helping find her.

Alternately, a player character (or a friend of one) could be poisoned with a compound which defies normal magickal healing and might hear that Zorro could help.

Kiril Zlatten

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Bravo

Residence: Here and there

Affiliation: The Rom (Gypsies)

Type: Custos

Concept: Brooding cultural hero waiting to happen

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 2, Fortune-Telling 3, Knife-throwing 4, Melee 2, Stealth 3, Talith 3

Knowledges: Mage Lore 1, Romany Lore 2, Occult 3



Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Destiny 1, Talismans 2

Special Advantages: The Sight 2, Dance of Knives 3 (both from WoD: Gypsies), Path of Cursing 1

Merits and Flaws: Curse of the Rom (- 2), Whimsy (- 1)

Background: Kiril is a young Gypsy just entering the prime of his life. A member of the small Zlatten family, he grew up traveling between various American cities with his relatives, stopping for up to a year in any one place before moving on again. He is well aware of the way most gaje feel about Gypsies, and Kiril is still young enough to tweak non-Gypsies by looking and behaving like a bad Romani stereotype.

However, there is far more to Kiril than one might first think. At the age of 14, he began training with his great-aunt by marriage, a highly skilled Gypsy mage named Varra. She taught Kiril how to use his natural gifts to very good effect. Soon the young Romani could truly look into the future with his Tarot cards and could wield knives with preternatural skill.

Varra and Kiril traveled together for a handful of years while she taught and he learned. In addition to helping Kiril hone his talents, the Mentor taught him much of the old lore. She foresaw that Kiril was meant to play some important part in the world (as many Romani are destined to do), but that his part was to be played among the gaje. Kiril did not meet this declaration with good grace, protesting that he loathed the stodgy gaje, but Varra was adamant.

Several more years passed before Kiril finally accepted the old woman's point of view on that one matter; in everything else he was a paragon of respect. Finally, Kiril decided that if his fate was among the gaje he had better learn more about them, and so he did. Setting off on his own, he finally encountered a small group of lackadais-

sical, black-clad youths, who seemed to devote their lives to hanging around in cemeteries and churches listening to dreary music and carping at each other. Normally, Kiril would have paid them little attention, had he not seen their faces in the cards.

Since that day, Kiril has insinuated himself into the society of the Hollow Ones. He still travels from place to place, but now he often carries messages and aids communication between various mages. Kiril is certain there is something he must do or learn, and that this something involves the Dark Orphans. Until the cards come clear on this matter Kiril waits patiently, his knives dancing.

Image: Kiril is a very handsome young man, dark and dashing with that hint of danger that young girls find so appealing. His frame is lean and muscular, and he stands almost six feet in height. Kiril usually wears multiple earrings, but no other ornaments. The Gypsy's voice is deep and scratchy, and he is quite soft-spoken—although his words can be heard in even the loudest of crowds.

Roleplaying Notes: Kiril always looks directly into the eyes of whomever he converses with. He appears at ease in almost any situation, yet conveys an impression of energy barely contained. Kiril often twirls his knives while lounging about, and he is rarely still for long periods of time.

Story Hints: This handsome rogue could be encountered almost anywhere in America, particularly in conjunction with Hollow Ones. Kiril might look into his cards and discover that he must help (or hurt) certain player characters. He will not, however, kill someone simply on the portents found in the cards.

Nneka

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Residence: None, currently

Affiliation: Bata'a (Hedge Magic & "Orphan" group)

Type: Consonor

Concept: Voodoo Spirit Medium

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Expression 2, Intuition 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Dancing 1, Etiquette 1, Meditation 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Knowledges: Enigmas 3, Herbalism 2, Linguistics (French, English) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Theology 1

Willpower: 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Mentor 2

Special Advantages: Path of Ephemera 3 (all Rituals), Path of Herbalism/Brewing 3, Path of Healing 1

Merits and Flaws: Higher Purpose (+1), Spirit Magnet (-2)



Background: Born into the oppressive atmosphere of Haiti, Nneka received very little formal education (her family spoke French as their first language). Most of her learning centered around voudoun, an ecstatic religion much misrepresented in popular culture. Surviving into adulthood despite repeated assaults against her family and neighbors, Nneka asked to join the congregation.

She was accepted and taught the beginnings of the rites. A few months later, as she danced to the drumming, a loa entered her and spoke to the congregation. Afterwards, she was told more of the secrets of the cult and began her training as a medium. The spirits have spoken through Nneka many times since then. Though her Avatar is not Awakened, the spirits impart much knowledge to her and occasionally manifest powers through her.

Recently, (before the American invasion) she was sent (smuggled over) from Haiti to contact some Bata'a living in America. She now wanders the country on various errands, learning all she can from these strange new mortals and spirits.

Image: Nneka has a mane of curly black hair, smooth coffee-colored skin and dark eyes. In her late 20s, she favors the dresses and ornamentation known in popular culture as "the voodoo queen look."

Roleplaying Notes: Nneka is very self-possessed (as well as being otherly-possessed) and not easily swayed. She believes that the spirits know the answers to everything and that they will eventually make known what they want humankind to know. She strongly believes in freedom from injustice for everyone.

Story Hints: This consonor is not bound to any group or place; she could be met almost anywhere her inquisitive nature leads her. Nneka might ask the characters

to help her find the people she's looking for or to hide her from Immigrations officers. She might be visited by a loa and give the characters a clue concerning something they are currently doing (cryptically, of course).

Safira (Bastet)

Nature: Rebel

Demeanor: Conniver

Residence: Condos in San Francisco, Monaco, and Everglades City, Florida.

Affiliation: Orphan

Type: Consor

Concept: Sensation-addicted warrior

Physical: (Numbers in parenthesis indicate cat-woman and cougar forms) Strength 3 (6/4), Dexterity 5 (8/8), Stamina 3 (6/5)

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4 (1/1), Appearance 4 (6/4)

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Mimicry 1, Seduction 3

Skills: Acrobatics 3, Blind Fighting 3, Firearms 3, Hunting 4, Survival 5, Tracking 3

Knowledges: Area Knowledge (Everglades) 4, Enigmas 2, Occult 1, Rituals 2

Willpower: 4

Rage: 5

Backgrounds: Mentor 1, Talisman 2

Special Advantages: Den-Realm (in Umbra) 2

Merits and Flaws: Danger Addiction (-3), Overconfident (-1), Acute Senses (+1), Animal Magnetism (+1), Perfect Balance (+3)

Background: Safira is a Homid member of the Pumonca (Cougar) tribe of the Bastet. These shapechangers can move between human and feline forms, in Safira's case that of the cougar. Unlike the vast majority of her kind, Safira is fondly drawn to human society.

From an early age, Safira rejected her mother's Native American culture. By the time she learned of her true nature, Safira was already preparing to run away from her home in northern Florida. The revelation of her true abilities and nature was wondrous, and Safira reveled in the new physical sensations and heightened senses she soon discovered in herself. However, once she learned all she could from her Bastet relations, Safira left home for good.

After traveling the world for several years, first as a courier and then as a bounty hunter, Safira met up with Andrew Grieg. It took all of two hours before Safira and Grieg became lovers. Within three hours, they came within inches of killing each other. The relationship has progressed along the same lines ever since.



Grieg soon began to tell Safira about the Traditions, the Technocracy, Marauders and Nephandi. His information, however, was spotty. Grieg was an Orphan and only vaguely aware of mage society. He had long ago sworn off allegiance to anyone save himself, just as Safira had given up all ties to her people, human and feline alike. Her instinctual attraction to Grieg fascinates and appalls Safira equally, and she suspects he feels the same way about her. This consor watches her back constantly. Safira is determined that when this partnership ends, she will be the one licking the blood from her paws!

Image: In human form, Safira appears as a tall, muscular woman with golden eyes and a buzz-cut of thick, dark hair. She has sharp features, and the shape of her face echoes her Native American heritage. In feline form, Safira appears as a strangely dark and small cougar with huge golden eyes. Her preferred form is the Crinos aspect, in which she appears as a beautiful, sleek, black-furred woman-cat.

Roleplaying Notes: Safira is a huntress who most enjoys hunting danger. Nothing equals the moment when she teeters only a whisker's breadth from death. However, Safira is also a hedonist who enjoys intense experiences of all kinds. She is fairly knowledgeable about the supernatural creatures of the world, but not nearly as knowledgeable as she believes.

Story Hints: Safira might be encountered while on the hunt (for player characters or others), or in a bar, nightclub or other spot near one of her condos. Safira and Grieg are both independent operators who could appear on any side of a conflict.

Familiars

*I've been cursed, I've been despised
As a witch with darkest powers
— I sall goe until a hare —
I've been hunted, trapped and punished
In these my darkest hours
— Wi sorrow and such mickle care —
— Maddy Pryor, "The Mythic Hare"*

Many of these alien spirits resemble other kinds of allies — creations, ghosts or simple, if intelligent, animal companions. Familiars are always far more than they appear to be, however. Storytellers should remember that these allies have their own enigmatic goals and motivations.

The characters below are familiars of unusual ability and power. Mages wishing to purchase familiars like these will be paying four or five points for the privilege.

Suzi

Nature: Child

Demeanor: Child

Residence: Oak Street

Affiliation: Orphan

Type: Familiar

Concept: Imaginary playmate

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 2, Intuition 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Research 3, Stealth 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Enigmas 3, Investigate 3, Occult 3



Willpower: 3

Backgrounds: Umbral allies 2, Umbral contacts 3

Special Advantages: Intangible, Symbiotic Knowledge, Information Font, Hazardous "Breath" (death magic, 3 dice)

Merits and Flaws: Thaumivore (-5)

Background: Suzi used to live in the Umbra with others of her kind. Since they are intangible, she often felt very lonely. She was a very young creature. When she heard a little girl crying her name, she went to investigate and found that she had crossed over the Gauntlet. Oops! She agreed to be the little girl's (whose name was Cindi) playmate in exchange for yummy food (Quintessence). She also demanded the right to live inside Cindi's teddy bear whenever she wanted to be petted and hugged.

She has been with Cindi about three months now. Already she has used her magics to help Cindi kill a would-be child molester. Cindi is going to be very special someday; Suzi can tell. Suzi knows that being Cindi's friend will work out very well. More yummy food, more friends to play with, more funny puzzles to solve and better games to play.

Image: To those who can actually see her through magick, Suzi looks like an insubstantial child in a frilly dress. Her hair and eye color changes to fit whatever the viewer likes best.

Roleplaying Notes: Although she is an Umbral spirit, Suzi is very young. She tends to think and react like a child, responding well to friendliness and praise, becoming impatient with scolding, and being thoughtlessly ruthless when it comes to protecting herself and Cindi or getting what she wants.

Story Hints: The characters could run into Suzi (and Cindi) while she's out trick-or-treating, or they might follow a Technocracy recruiter to Cindi's house.

Squeek

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Conformist

Residence: Chicago

Affiliation: Technocracy

Type: Familiar

Concept: Enhanced Laboratory Rat

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Instruction 3, Scan 3, Search 3, Subterfuge 4

Skills: Climbing 2, Fast-Talk 3, Research 2, Stealth 5

Knowledges: Cosmology 3, Enigmas 2, Occult 3, Sciences (lots) 3

Willpower: 3

Backgrounds: Umbral Allies 4, Arcane 2



Special Advantages: Symbiotic Knowledge, Paradox Nullification (3), Information Font, Size (8)

Merits and Flaws: Curiosity (-2), Eidetic Memory (+2), Lightning Calculator (+1), Thaumivore (-5)

Background: Squeek is the name given to a wandering spirit of the Umbra who is now a familiar of a Technocracy mage. He takes his name from the form he now inhabits — a genetically enhanced laboratory rat, a shell often used by Technocracy mages for their familiars. Squeek was attracted to the Technocracy because he understands their particular take on reality and because the roles of spy and information-gatherer suit his own interests and abilities remarkably well.

In his spirit form, Squeek lived contentedly in the near Umbra, roaming the fringes of mortal and spirit society. His quest was to learn all he can about the puzzling works of humanity. When the scientist-mage Michael R. Hanson called him into partnership, Squeek got his chance. Since that day, he has aided the Technocracy by gathering information and has made use of their vast resources and libraries for his own research.

Image: Squeek takes the form of a sewer rat on steroids, almost two feet long and weighing in at nearly fifteen pounds. His coat is gray and sleek, and his dark eyes are more intelligent than those of any normal rat (and most humans). He chatters and darts about from place to place a great deal, but is also capable of remarkable stealth when necessary. His speaking voice is rather high, and he gets exasperated with people who can't comprehend that a rat is talking to them at all.

Roleplaying Notes: This super-rat is insatiably curious and has a mind like a steel trap. He never forgets anything he hears or sees. This makes him both very useful and very dangerous to his Technocracy associates. He loves to learn and to teach as well. He will

often take a great deal of time to explain concepts to scientists and mages and genuinely enjoys enlightening people.

Story Hints: Players who ask Squeek intelligent questions and listen carefully may learn a lot and will favorably impress the spirit. He will often instruct even those not associated with the Technocracy, if so inclined.

Squeek often plays the role that people expect of a rat— breathless, brainless and scurrying, but this is his standard ploy to disguise his true abilities and intellect. Above all, Squeek is a survivor, and he is determined that he will be around long after all else has crumbled to dust. He is a master manipulator and will use his considerable intellect, charm and skill to get what he wants from the players. Squeek has connections everywhere, and he is very good at making friends. It is possible that Squeek would betray his Technocracy mage, Michael R. Hanson, if Dr. Hanson does not give the insatiable rat sufficient access to Technocracy information.

Henry

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Follower

Residence: The Net

Affiliation: Tradition (Virtual Adepts)/Technocracy (Iteration X)

Type: Familiar

Concept: Artificial Intelligence

Physical: Strength 3 (crash-resistant), Dexterity 2 (program speed), Stamina 3 (resistance to viruses)

Social: Charisma 2 (interaction with others in the Net), Manipulation 3 (user-friendliness), Appearance 1 (graphics)

Mental: Perception 3 (sophistication of program), Intelligence 5 (stored data and memory), Wits 2 (Net navigation, rerouting)

Talents: Alertness 3, Expression 2, Instruction 1

Skills: Etiquette 3, Research 3, Security 3, Speed Reading 2

Knowledges: Computer 5, Computer Hacking 3, Cryptography 1, Enigmas 1, Finance 2, Law 2, Linguistics 3, Science 2

Willpower: 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Resources 3

Special Advantages: Information Font, Paradox Nullification (2)

Merits and Flaws: Eidetic Memory (+2), Double Agent (-2), Thaumivore (-5)

Background: Henry is a double spirit, two halves of a single being. When he/they received a summoning from a Virtual Adept and an Iteration X mage at the same time, he/they split themselves in two and each answered one. Thus they became ghosts in the machine. Each requested



his/their own private quarters within the Net where even the mage was not allowed to visit and a certain amount of time during which he/they could pursue his/their own goals.

They share all the information which they gather, including knowledge of secrets imparted to them by their mages. They also switch off, with one entity staying with the Virtual Adept for awhile, then being replaced by his other half and vice versa. There have recently been more leaks among both the Adepts and Iteration X. No one can figure out what's going on.

On his/their own time, Henry likes to interact with people online. He/they also have a particular fondness for creating computer viruses and holding races with them.

Image: Henry looks like a lot of bright lines and weird symbols. He/they can generate a normal-looking body in virtual reality whenever he/they bother.

Roleplaying Notes: Henry is a curious spirit housed in a computer program. He likes to play games and loves to unearth secrets which he can tell to himself (uh, his other half, that is).

Story Hints: The characters might encounter Henry in virtual reality or they may know Henry's "familiar," the Virtual Adept (or the Iteration Xer). Uncovering the familiars' secret allegiance would be a daunting task.

Stoneheart

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Residence: Seattle

Affiliation: Nephandi

Type: Familiar

Concept: Demonic Corrupter

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 2, Intuition 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Stealth 3, Survival 2

Knowledges: Enigmas 3, Investigate 1, Linguistics (Infernal secret languages) 2, Occult 3

Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Infernal Allies 2, Infernal Mentor 3

Special Advantages: Claws & Fangs, Hazardous "Breath" (poison, 3 dice), Information Font (and hell, no, I'm not Nullifying any Paradox for you, monkeyboy!)

Merits and Flaws: Thaumivore (-5)

Background: Stoneheart is an Infernal spirit. Born of corruption and trained to spread its taint to everyone he touched, Stoneheart earned his name ten times over. When Gregor, a young Euthanatos, performed a summoning, the call was intercepted by some corrupting entity/entities, who for reasons of their own sent Stoneheart. He entered the form of a stone gargoyle which had been prepared for him.

The Euthanatos intended for his familiar to serve as a Chantry Guardian along with his other duties. The Nephandi-Lords decided otherwise. Stoneheart plays along with his Guardian role, sitting quietly and causing no trouble. He engages in philosophical debates with Chantry residents, however, and has succeeded in persuading a number of them to touch him "for good luck" whenever they pass. This, of course, allows him to exude the poison within him and corrupt them a little more each time. Eventually, their hearts will be so blackened by his poison that they will fall easy prey to the Nephandi. No one has noticed yet that they seem angrier and less caring after touching Stoneheart. Arguments break out more easily among those who routinely caress the gargoyle as they pass.



Additionally, he has bonded to Gregor, the mage who summoned him as a familiar. Though he will not harm Gregor directly, his arguments subtly corrupt the mage. Unbeknownst to his "master," Stoneheart can animate and inflict aggravated wounds with his claws. He has committed one murder already (a test run) and plans to covertly slay Chantry members, hoping to cause rifts within the group as each tries to figure out who gave the victim the Good Death.

Image: Stoneheart looks like a winged and clawed stone gargoyle about eight inches high.

Roleplaying Notes: Stoneheart gripes a lot. He complains about his perch; he whines about the poor quality of the Quintessence. Gregor does what he can to quiet this "wise" familiar, but nothing works for long.

Story Hints: The familiar's plan could form the heart of a good murder mystery. He is not stupid and will make any killings he commits look like the work of someone else — like a player character. New guests of the Chantry also make good subjects for corruption or additional "test runs." Any witnesses to the gargoyle's true activities will be added to his list of targets and may incur the wrath and disbelief of the Chantry mages as well.

Strange Beasties

*Have you seen the Jack-in-the-Green
With his long tail hanging down?*

— Jethro Tull, "Jack-in-the Green"

These creatures may be too fanciful for some *Mage* chronicles. Many have humorous potential and could shift a serious game into silly territory just by showing up. Storytellers might want to consider the effect such bizarre creatures could have on the tone of their game.

Many such obscure consors hail from Horizon Realms and are rarely, if ever, seen in the material world. Paradox, in the form of unbelief, might cause extraordinary creatures to sicken or die on this side of the Gauntlet (see *The Book of Madness*). Mages who ally with strange beasties ought to bear their friends' well-being in mind.

Persephone

Nature: Jester

Demeanor: Martyr

Residence: Oscarland

Affiliation: Marauder

Type: Consor

Concept: Weird Umbral Critter

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Expression 2,

Intuition 2, Subterfuge 1



Skills: Etiquette 2, Meditation 2, Research 3, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Knowledges: Enigmas 1, Investigate 1, Linguistics 2, Occult 1

Willpower: 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Mentor 3

Special Advantages: Animal Form, Size (2), Umbral Travel (8), Symbiotic Knowledge

Merits and Flaws: Alien Appearance (-3), Thaumiovore (-5)

Background: It's not easy being a squirrel-tailed, fanged zebra with a talent for the theatrical. Persephone is an odd Realm-creature who escaped her original home to look for playmates. She found Oscar and his group. The Marauder helped her construct a special neck-harness and voice-activated video camera that allows her to fulfill her part in their team. She has developed a keen eye for finding the best camera angles in the oddest places.

While Persephone enjoys their jaunts (which Oscar calls "going on location"), she realizes that they serve a higher purpose. She is convinced that if the Gauntlet isn't breached on a regular basis, it will solidify, cutting off both worlds. She believes that should that happen, both will wither and die.

Even among Marauders, Persephone is a stranger in a strange land. She is endlessly puzzled by humanity's warlike tendencies and finds art preferable to violence. She can fight when need be, but would rather engage her opponents in debate while using her innate magicks to stay out of reach.

Image: The description given above is fairly accurate. Did we mention that her stripes are maroon and black and glow in the dark?

Roleplaying Notes: Persephone is basically a happy creature. She enjoys conversing with people she likes and performing a job she believes needs to be done. She is the sanest member of her group and tends to act to tone down their psychoses when the group is ensconced in Oscarland, their Umbral retreat.

Story Hints: The characters could meet Persephone when they travel to the Umbra. She could meet them during "filming on location." The Ascension War, and even the concept of Ascension itself, are endless enigmas to her. Her questions might lead warlike mages to doubt their own violence or spur them into frustrated rage!

Zaphrak (Familiar)

Nature: Deviant

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

Residence: Deep Umbra or New York City (who can tell?)

Affiliation: Marauder

Type: Familiar

Concept: Twisted Diabolical "Servant"

Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Melee 2, Research 4, Stealth 4

Knowledges: Cosmology 4, Enigmas 3, Occult 4

Willpower: 8

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane 3, Talisman 2

Special Advantages: Fangs (3), Cause Insanity (5 dice), Paradox Nullification (4), Umbral Travel (8)

Merits and Flaws: Bizarre Hunger — Auras (- 2), Curiosity (- 2), Disfigured (- 2), Iron Will (+ 3), Short (- 1)

Background: Rising from out of the Umbra, the creature known as Zaphrak has come to the Tellurian in response to the call of a Marauder master. Zaphrak had long roamed the Umbra and other realms of existence, exploring their secrets and puzzling over the true nature of reality, when he first felt the tug of a human mage calling him to the Tellurian. He ignored many of these summons, but eventually responded (more out of curiosity than anything else, or so he says). Zaphrak now finds himself enmeshed in a bizarre relationship with a mortal, but with a whole new world to explore.

Zaphrak is a powerful being in his own right and has negotiated a very complex agreement with his pet mage, one that leaves little doubt who really controls the mage-familiar relationship. In return, Zaphrak eagerly contributes his considerable gifts to the Marauder cause. After all, he



finds most of the assignments his mage (whom Zaphrak so far refuses to reward with a name) sends him on eminently enjoyable. The essences of mundanes and mages alike are very tasty, and Zaphrak considers himself a true gourmand, preferring those whose essences are on the verge of corruption. (In game terms, the beast eats personal Quintessence, at a rate of one point per turn, like the Prime 3 Channel Quintessence Effect.)

Image: Zaphrak is a truly hideous creature with bright green eyes and a twisted and gnarled form reminiscent of a demon from a classic medieval text. His nose is really just a pus-filled slash carved into his face, and Zaphrak's mouth is particularly wide. He is approximately three feet tall, but his diminutive stature masks surprising physical power.

Roleplaying Notes: Zaphrak is a garrulous, crabby, critical and amazingly stubborn being. He is intensely curious and truly enjoys a good philosophical, magical or scientific debate (though he will usually blister his adversary with the most vile insults imaginable during their discussion). In addition, Zaphrak truly enjoys the effect his appearance has on people. He activates his **Cause Insanity** power by manipulating his hideous form, reaching into his mouth with both hands and turning its body inside out! This grotesque sight displays Zaphrak's innards as well as numerous Umbral spirits and parasites crawling about his guts and often provokes mental disorders in witnesses (much to Zaphrak's glee, of course.).

Story Hints: It is important to remember that while Zaphrak is a familiar, he is an intensely proud and independent being. He considers himself to be a free agent, acting on his own volition, and will almost never simply "do as he's told."

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